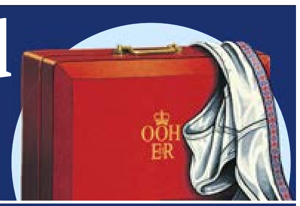


Viv Groskop

'How I got my confidence back'

→ *G2*

John Crace's digested read
Whips by Cleo Watson



The Guardian

Newspaper of the year

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Government accused of cover-up over battle for Covid evidence

Rowena Mason
Ian Sample
Aubrey Allegretti

Rishi Sunak has been accused of attempting to cover up the actions of ministers during the pandemic as the Cabinet Office intensified its battle to withhold Boris Johnson's WhatsApp messages from the Covid inquiry.

The prime minister insisted his government had been cooperating with the investigation but is facing increasing calls from experts and MPs - with some coming from within his own party - to hand over evidence without redactions.

Labour and the Lib Dems accused the government of a potential cover-up, while relatives of those who died in the pandemic questioned what ministers had to hide.

The inquiry, led by the retired judge Heather Hallett, has used sweeping powers to request unredacted notebooks, diaries and WhatsApp correspondence between Johnson and 40 senior government figures.

But the government is opposing the request on grounds that it wants to protect the privacy of ministers and officials, and is considering legal action to prevent disclosure.

Two sources with knowledge of the inquiry's requests said the Cabinet Office was resisting handing over the material from Johnson and his aide because they feared giving in woud mean all other evidence from ministers, including Sunak himself, would have to be submitted in an unredacted form.

Hallett has given the government another two days to hand over the unredacted information in relation to Johnson and one of his senior aides, Henry Cook, with the material now due by 4pm tomorrow. Refusing to comply with the inquiry's order is a potential criminal offence.

A spokesman for Johnson said he had "no objection" to his 24 notebooks and WhatsApps being given to the inquiry and claimed government lawyers had already been given access to them. But the Cabinet Office released a new statement yesterday holding firm against giving over uncensored material, with the government still considering the possibility of a legal challenge.

A spokesperson said: "We are firmly of the view that the inquiry does not have the power to request unambiguously irrelevant information that is beyond the scope of this investigation. This includes the WhatsApp messages of government employees' which are not about work but instead are entirely personal and relate to their private lives."

However, Bloomberg reported it had seen leaked government legal advice from the 12 →

Kremlin threat after Moscow hit by drones

Andrew Roth
Pjotr Sauer

Moscow was yesterday targeted with a large-scale drone attack for the first time in its 15-month-old war in Ukraine, marking a new inflection point in the conflict.

The Kremlin has threatened to take the "harshest possible measures" in response to the strikes.

Russia continues to pummel Ukraine with deadly missile and drone strikes on a near-daily basis. Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, faced its third air raid in 24 hours yesterday morning.

Video footage posted on social media yesterday showed one low-flying drone exploding in a field outside Moscow, and others flying over houses in the city's expensive Rublyovka district and flats in south-west neighbourhoods. Another video from Moscow's outskirts showed a Pantsir surface-to-air missile system firing at a target nearby.

The Russian defence ministry said eight drones 6 →



PHOTOGRAPH: GO NAKAMURA/REUTERS

Theranos
Elizabeth Holmes begins 11-year prison sentence

News *Page 4* →

AI experts warn of its threat to humanity

Geneva Abdul

A group of experts from across the globe have warned that artificial intelligence technology should be considered a societal risk and prioritised in the same class as pandemics and nuclear wars.

The brief statement, signed by hundreds of tech executives and academics, was released by the Center for AI Safety (CAIS) yesterday, amid growing concerns over the need for regulation and the risks the technology poses to humanity.

"Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war," the statement said. Signatories included the chief executives from Google's 4 →

22
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Inside *31/05/23*
Four sections every day

News and Sport

Rail strikes resume
Passengers face disruption today in the first of three planned walkouts by unions
Page 5

Journal Outside G2
Opinions and ideas

“Who better to moralise over the woes at This Morning than MPs?
Marina Hyde
Page 3

G2 Centre pullout
Features and arts

Dear England
James Graham explains why Gareth Southgate is epic play material
Page 8

Save up to 34% with a subscription to the Guardian and the Observer
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Weather
Page 34

Quick crossword
Back of G2

Cartoon
Journal, page 4

Cryptic crossword
Back of Journal

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News

Protester interrupts Stock's talk at Oxford Union on trans rights

Matthew Weaver

▼ *The trans activist, wearing a T-shirt saying 'no more dead trans kids', sitting in the Oxford Union hall in front of Kathleen Stock*



The gender-critical feminist Kathleen Stock was forced to halt her contested appearance at the Oxford Union after a trans activist glued themself to the debating chamber close to the speaker's chair.

Stock, who argues that transgender people cannot expect all the rights afforded by biological sex, had been speaking above the sound outside a rowdy protest at her invitation when a group of activists stormed the debating chamber.

The trans rights protesters waved flags and shouted slogans as they were booed by audience members while some were escorted out by security.

Another protester, wearing a T-shirt saying "no more dead trans kids" glued themself to the floor less than 2 metres from Stock's chair.

Stock was urged by the audience to continue. She said she could not go on until given approval by security.

The arrival of police in the chamber was greeted by cheers. They initially struggled to remove the activist but after about 20 minutes they succeeded.

When the event continued, Stock was asked to offer solutions to the culture war on the trans issue. She said: "I don't blame that protest, it wasn't traumatic for me. You can disagree reasonably and still be friends." But she said she was worried when people felt "intimidated" into not challenging what she called the "propaganda machine" of trans campaigners.

Stock urged her detractors to read her book, Material Girls, and said: "I want trans people protected from violence and discrimination." She insisted she was not anti trans despite what her critics said.

In her address, Stock said it was "not fair on females" to share with trans women spaces such as changing rooms and bathrooms because of the potential threat of violence. "Why should females take this burden on?" she asked.

Stock added: "We are supposed to care about women. It is a risk of a man saying he is a woman and going into a space and taking advantage of that."

Stock called for third spaces to protect trans people.

Challenged on her belief that trans identity was a fiction, Stock said: "I'm definitely saying something that is unpopular as you can all tell.

"But if you don't go with reality it will hit you in the face. You can't overcome your body. When you are lost in the fiction and can't talk about reality you've got a problem." As Stock's speech was due to begin a protest march of more than 100 people gathered shouting "Out of the closet into the street". They held various banners protesting at Stock's invitation to speak, including: "Our existence is not a debate"; "Take Stock of Trans Joy" and "Trans Power".

The march was led by Amiad Haran Diman, president of Oxford University's LGBTQ+ Society, holding a banner that read "Trans Women are Real Women".

A handful of counter-protesters also gathered, including one called Rebecca who wore video camera while holding a sign saying "Doc Stock Rocks" and said: "So far it feels peaceful but I've been to a few events in the past and it's been far from peaceful."



▲ *Amiad Haran Diman (right) leading yesterday's Oxford protest*

Organisers of the Trans+ Pride demonstration insisted they did not want to stifle free speech.

Diman, who is studying for a PhD in politics, told the Guardian: "I will be on the frontline to make sure everyone can come in. I'll make sure the event goes ahead, because I don't believe in violence. I believe in the rule of law. And I'll be fighting for her freedom of speech."

The demonstration was about supporting the trans community, Diman added. "I don't care about Kathleen Stock and I don't care about Oxford Union. They love attention.

"But I care about the trans members of my community who need to know someone has their back. Someone is caring for them. That's what the protest is about.

"She [Stock] wants to be the polite voice of a trans exclusionary movement, but I don't believe in her good faith. I don't think she wants to have a civil conversation. If you look at her behaviour online it is very hostile.

"I think it is hateful and intolerant. I'm very ready to have a conversation, but if the Oxford Union had wanted this real conversation they would have invited an expert on gender identity or on trans healthcare, instead they invited someone who has no expertise and just abuses people."

Peter Manshausen, a protester, questioned why Stock had been given a platform and said: "I'm a PhD student studying climate change. If you debate climate change, you don't put a climate change denier and a climate scientist together.

"That's a false balance. If you debate trans rights, you don't put up someone who denies the existence of trans people on the same platform as someone who may speak up for trans rights."

Don't dismiss Covid lab leak theory, says top China scientist

Amy Hawkins
Senior China correspondent

The former director of China's Center for Disease Control and Protection (CDC) has said the lab leak theory for the origins of Covid-19 should not be discounted. George Gao, an internationally respected virologist, also said another branch of the Chinese government had investigated the lab leak theory – the first such acknowledgment that some kind of official investigation took place.

"They haven't found wrongdoing," he said. Gao served as the CDC head until July 2022, putting him at the forefront of China's investigations into the origins of Covid. The virus was first detected in Wuhan, central China, in December 2019. Numerous studies have suggested Covid probably emerged from a wet market in Wuhan where live animals were sold.

However, the city is also home to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a research facility that studies coronaviruses. That has led to the theory that the virus may have leaked from a laboratory. The theory, initially dismissed by public health experts, was pushed by Donald Trump when he was US president. China vigorously denied it.

Gao told the BBC yesterday: "You can always suspect anything. That's science. Don't rule out anything." Gao is now vice-president of the National Natural Science Foundation of China, a government funding body.

The investigation into the origins of Covid have been frustrated by the Chinese government's lack of cooperation with international fact-finding efforts and politicisation of the issue. In the west, questions about a possible lab leak have become linked to the idea that the virus was deliberately and maliciously released into the world, which has fuelled conspiracy theories.

Since Joe Biden became US president, the American authorities have started to take the accidental leak theory more seriously.

In May 2021 Biden ordered an intelligence investigation into the hypothesis. Earlier this year the Wall Street Journal reported that an updated and classified 2021 US energy department report had concluded with "low confidence" that the virus probably emerged from a lab leak – a conclusion that runs counter to reports by a number of other US intelligence agencies.

In March 2021, researchers from the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded, after a visit to Wuhan, that the lab leak theory was "extremely unlikely". But that visit had been hampered by the Chinese government and phase two of the investigation has since been abandoned. Speaking to Nature in February, Maria Van Kerkhove, a WHO epidemiologist, said: "The politics across the world of this really hampered progress on understanding the origins."



▲ *A guard blocks entry to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in early 2021*

The Chinese government has called the lab leak theory "false and erroneous". But in his BBC interview Gao said: "We really don't know where the virus came from … the question is still open."

Gao, who was educated in the UK, the US and Canada, is known in China's public health community for having good relationships with international colleagues – and for being willing to occasionally speak out of turn with regards to the Communist party line.

In April 2021 Gao caused controversy by seemingly questioning the efficacy of Chinese vaccines, although he later said he had been referring to all vaccines, not just Chinese ones. China is grappling with a new wave of Covid after abandoning virtually all pandemic control restrictions in December.

The heat is on: Birmingham balti houses fight for survival as appetites for 'curry night' fade



'It's not so much the Balti Triangle now, it's a food triangle'

Zafar Hussain
Restaurateur

An order is prepared at Shahi Nan Kabab in Birmingham's Balti Triangle

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN ROBERTSON/ THE GUARDIAN

Lamb kebabs cooking on skewers. Below left: Zafar Hussain, owner of Shababs, another long-established balti house

Jessica Murray
Midlands correspondent

Back in its heyday in the 90s and 00s, Birmingham's famous Balti Triangle was home to more than 30 authentic balti houses, with an estimated 20,000 diners a week passing through.

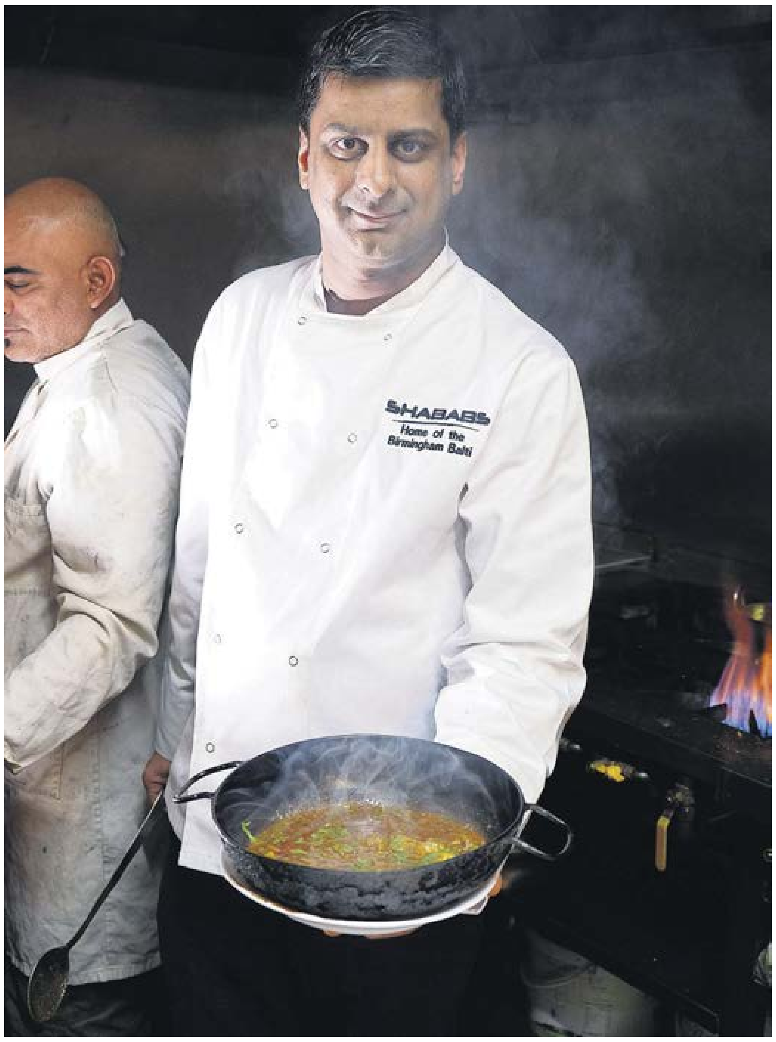
But today just four remain, as economic pressures and changing culinary trends have led many to be replaced by takeaways and dessert shops. Last year, Adil's, a Balti Triangle mainstay often credited with inventing the dish, closed after 43 years when its owner retired and there was no one to pick up the reins.

"There are a number of things that have killed off [balti houses]. When it became really popular, landlords hiked up the rents. And a lot of [the restaurants] are family run and it seems the sons and daughters don't want to know," said Andy Munro, secretary of the Association for the Protection of the Authentic Balti.

As part of an exhibition he is planning this year to celebrate the history of the balti, Munro has photographed every site that used to be a balti house; many are now burger joints and dessert parlours.

"When I left home years ago, I started eating curries because I wanted to have something different," he said. "Many people in the younger generation, they don't want a home-cooked curry, they want something trendy, a burger or dessert. But these things go in cycles and I hope it doesn't stay that way."

The balti, invented in Birmingham in the 1970s, is defined by the thin steel balti bowl it is cooked and served in, rather than specific ingredients. Munro had been working



to secure EU traditional speciality guaranteed status for the Birmingham balti, although this was halted by Brexit. He is now hoping to work with the city council on a local accreditation scheme.

One of the last remaining balti houses in the triangle is Shababs, where trade is booming despite the decline elsewhere. It is in the process of expanding its restaurant to double the current 120 seats.

Owner Zafar Hussain, who took over the restaurant from his father and brother, who founded it in 1987, said his customer base had changed



in the past decade from predominantly white to become much more diverse. "There used to be a lot of pubs around here, and these worked hand-in-hand with restaurants like ours. It was a busy night every night after the pubs closed," he said.

"But the culture has changed. This area is not so much the Balti Triangle any more, it's a food triangle. The balti houses have been replaced by different cuisines, but the craze now is these tea and dessert places, and there are also lots of burger places popping up."

Azhar Mahmood has been serving balti dishes at his restaurant, Shahi Nan Kabab, since the late 80s, and says the area around him has completely changed as other balti houses have slowly disappeared.

"The difference between me and them is that their clients were all European – my clients are all Asians," he said. "But it's important to preserve the Birmingham name, the balti brand. Other places do curries but they're not baltis."

The Balti Triangle originated as a cluster of balti houses in an area just south of Birmingham city centre, sandwiched between Balsall Heath and Sparkhill and home to one of the largest Pakistani Kashmiri populations in Britain.

It flourished in the years either side of the millennium, with extensive TV and newspaper coverage, a play at the Birmingham Rep titled Balti Kings, and even a balti ice-cream. In 2007, Rough Guides listed it at number 15 out of 25 things to do in Britain before you die.

Even today, the area still attracts plenty of tourists. "Loads of people travel for miles to come to the Balti Triangle, and I think they're probably expecting to see a balti house on every corner. But it's not like that any more," said Munro, although he added that there are balti houses popping up in other areas of the city.

"It does have a future, but we need to work to make sure it does. No matter what happens, the Balti Triangle is still where it was invented. You can't take away the history of the place."

Casualty's longest-serving actor to leave BBC soap after 37 years

Mabel Banfield-Nwachi

Casualty's longest-serving cast member is to exit the soap after almost four decades, the BBC said yesterday.

Derek Thompson – the only remaining actor from the first episode in 1986 – has played nurse Charlie Fairhead in nearly 900 episodes.

"The time has come for me to hang up Charlie's scrubs after the most wonderful 37 years," Thompson said.

Charlie was inspired by Pete Salt, a real-life nurse who worked as an adviser on the drama series.

"Together with the writers and producers, I have tried to bring to Charlie the compassion, kindness, heroism and sound judgment that we all see and love in Pete," Thompson said.

"I want to say thanks to Pete and everyone else over that time who has inspired me in bringing this character to life."

During his time on the show, Charlie survived being run over by an ambulance on his wedding day, was shot in the chest by a man with schizophrenia and suffered a near-fatal cardiac arrest during a gang siege.

In 2020, viewers saw the farewell of fellow nurse Lisa "Duffy" Duffin, played by Cathy Shipton, after a 30-year will-they-won't-they relationship between the pair.

The BBC described the character as a linchpin of the hospital's emergency department.The broadcaster said Thompson would continue filming until autumn, with his final scenes airing next year in the "culmination of a gripping exit storyline, which will see the character front and centre of the action".

Jon Sen, the executive producer of Casualty for BBC Studios, said: "Derek and I would often joke that, after such a long and dramatic career in the NHS, there was almost nothing that Charlie hadn't seen.

"So it was an amazing surprise to



Derek Thompson has played nurse Charlie in nearly 900episodes

me when Derek arrived with a brilliant idea for Charlie's exit as part of an upcoming storyline, which was too good to pass up.

"Over nearly four decades, Derek has crafted a character who is woven into the fabric of British TV history. We will miss his craft, his humour and his onscreen presence."

A list of top earners published by the corporation in 2017 showed Thompson was one of the best-paid actors, reportedly earning between £350,000 and £399,999 in the previous financial year.

According to the figures from the BBC's annual report, this was more than Peter Capaldi, then the star of Doctor Who, who was paid £200,000 to £249,999.

▼ *Elizabeth Holmes – with her mother, Noel, and partner, Billy Evans – arrives for sentencing in 2022* PHOTOGRAPH: AMY OSBORNE/GETTY



Elizabeth Holmes starts 11-year prison camp sentence for Silicon Valley fraud

Kari Paul
San Francisco

The Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes turned herself in for an 11-year prison sentence yesterday, marking a final chapter in a years-long fraud saga that riveted Silicon Valley.

The 39-year-old tech founder had been ordered to report to a minimum-security federal prison camp in Texas no later than 2pm , according to a previous court filing.

Holmes had been on bail since she was indicted on fraud charges in 2018 over her role as the head of the failed blood-testing firm. She was convicted in November 2022 on four counts of defrauding investors and sentenced to 11 years and three months in prison.

Under federal law, Holmes is required to serve 85% of the time, even if her sentence is reduced for good conduct. Federal prison camp Bryan, where Holmes has been ordered to serve her sentence, houses primarily white-collar and non-violent female federal prisoners, and lacks the fencing and strict rules of higher-security jails. It has a work-focused programme that requires all inmates to hold a job for a minimum of 90 days.

Holmes had attempted to delay serving her sentence, arguing that she should be able to remain out of custody while she seeks a new trial based on alleged wrongdoing by the prosecution. The US district judge Edward Davila denied those requests in San Francisco earlier this month, stating that a new trial or an overturning of the guilty verdict was unlikely.

Holmes reportedly spent her final days of freedom with her partner, Billy Evans, and their two children. Her trial was originally delayed as she gave birth to her first child in July 2021 and appeared at her sentencing hearing in November pregnant with her second child, who was born in March.

Sunny Balwani, Holmes' former business and romantic partner, was convicted on all 12 counts of fraud he faced, and in April began his 13-year sentence at a prison in California.

The imprisonment of both figureheads marks the end of the dramatic tale of Theranos – a company Holmes founded in 2003 after dropping out of Stanford University at 19. She promised a revolutionary technology that could run hundreds of health tests on just one drop of blood, amassing millions of dollars in funding from big-name backers including the former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger and the media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

"Holmes was going to be the first woman who reached billionaire status and join the pantheon of tech leaders," said John Carreyrou, then a Wall Street Journal reporter, whose investigation into the company was key to exposing its lies.

"People were really rooting for her – young girls were writing her letters. A lot of people wanted to believe the fairytale, because it would have represented real progress in a very male-dominated world of Silicon Valley."



▲ *Elizabeth Holmes arrives at the federal prison camp in Bryan, Texas*

Theranos was valued at more than $10bn at its peak in 2014, until reporting by Carreyrou in the Wall Street Journal in 2015 revealed shortcomings in the company's core technology – leading the company to quickly unravel.

Over the succeeding months, Carreyrou exposed how the testing devices Holmes said could perform a variety of medical tests with just a drop of blood were not actually being used to perform most of the analyses.

After scrutiny from regulators, Theranos started to retract its tests and recall its machines. Holmes stepped down as CEO in June 2018, with the company dissolving that same year.

Holmes settled with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which accused her of an "elaborate, years-long fraud". But the US government charged Holmes and Balwani with defrauding both investors and patients, and making false claims about the effectiveness of the company's technology.

The trial of Holmes lasted 18 weeks, featuring testimony from high-profile Theranos investors including the former US defence secretary James Mattis.

The defence painted Holmes as an ambitious and naive young founder who was unaware of the extent to which Theranos's technology was malfunctioning. Prior to her sentencing, Holmes expressed regret for letting down "the people who believed in us".

"I am devastated by my failings," she said. "Every day for the past years I have felt deep pain for what people went through because I failed them. I regret my failings with every cell of my body."

The harsh sentence – much longer than the 18 months of house arrest requested by Holmes's team – is thought to have set a precedent in Silicon Valley and its hype cycle that enabled Theranos to garner as much success as it did with so few checks and balances.

Holmes has embarked on a campaign to rehabilitate her image, breaking seven years of media silence with an extensive profile in the New York Times on her new life as "Liz" – a devoted mother who has abandoned her signature baritone speaking voice.

She faces three years of supervised release after leaving prison and has been ordered to pay $452m (£365m) in restitution to victims of the fraud.

Experts join forces to warn over AI's threat to humanity

Continued *from page 1*

DeepMind, the ChatGPT developer OpenAI and the AI startup Anthropic.

The statement comes as industry experts have made calls for regulation of the technology, amid fears it could significantly affect job markets, harm the health of millions and increase the risk of weaponised disinformation.

The man often described as the godfather of AI, Geoffrey Hinton – also a signatory – quit Google this month, citing its "existential risk". The risk was acknowledged by No 10 last week for the first time – a swift change of tack within government that came two months after its AI white paper, which industry figures have said is already out of date.

While the letter published yesterday is not the first, it could be the most impactful to date, said Michael Osborne, a professor in machine learning at the University of Oxford and co-founder of AI company Mind Foundry, who was among the signatories. "It really is remarkable that so many people signed up to this letter," he said. "That does show that there is a growing realisation among those of us working in AI that existential risks are a real concern."

Calls to curb the risks from AI come after the success of ChatGPT, launched in November last year. The language model had already been widely adopted by millions of people, said Osborne, and had rapidly advanced beyond predictions by those best informed in the industry.

"Because we don't understand AI very well there is a prospect that it might play a role as a kind of new competing organism … a sort of invasive species that we've designed that might play some devastating role in our survival as a species," he said.

Yesterday's warning was intentionally succinct – just a single sentence – to encompass a broad coalition of scientists who might not agree on the most likely risks or the best solutions to prevent them, said Dan Hendrycks, executive director of the San Francisco-based CAIS. "There's a variety of people from all top universities in various different fields who are concerned by this and think that this is a global priority," Hendrycks said. "So we had to get people to sort of come out of the closet, so to speak, on this issue, because many were sort of silently speaking among each other."

More than 1,000 researchers and technologists, including Elon Musk, had signed a much longer letter this year calling for a six-month pause on AI development because, they said, it poses "profound risks to society and humanity".

Glastonbury festival
New names added to this year's lineup
Page 9



Succession finale
Matthew Macfadyen's star status sealed
Page 19

National

CBI seeks insolvency advice ahead of confidence vote

Anna Isaac

Britain's most prominent business lobby group has sought guidance on possible insolvency as it battles for survival in the wake of a sexual harassment scandal.

The legal advice was requested by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) ahead of the publication today of a prospectus setting out plans for a turnaround of the organisation. Members will be asked to decide its future in a confidence vote, with the results announced at a crunch meeting on 6 June, which will determine whether the CBI and its new director general, Rain Newton-Smith, have a mandate to continue their work.

The CBI - which describes itself as the "voice of business" in the UK - lost more than 50 members last month, including retailer John Lewis and NatWest bank, and its president has admitted to hiring "culturally toxic" individuals.

Both the government and the Labour party have suspended engagement with the group, and the CBI said it would mothball its operations until after the June meeting.

A spokesperson for the CBI said its board had asked for advice about potential restructuring options, including insolvency and being "smaller and refocused".

The CBI has engaged law firm Fox Williams to carry out an independent investigation of HR processes and handling of complaints, but it is understood to have gone to a separate firm for the insolvency and restructuring advice, the Guardian understands. The request for advice was first reported by Sky News.

A flood of members left after several reports in the Guardian about allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault, including rape, spanning several years. The exodus has created uncertainty for the group's staff of about 300 people, who now fear losing their jobs.

In an open letter to members last month, the group's president, Brian McBride conceded the CBI had hired "culturally toxic" individuals and made "mistakes in how we organised the business that led to terrible consequences". He detailed a range of failings and plans for improving the CBI's operations.

McBride said: "We didn't put in place sufficient preventative measures to protect our people from those seeking to cause harm and we didn't react properly when issues arose …

"We failed to filter out culturally toxic people during the hiring process. We failed to conduct proper cultural onboarding of staff. Some of our managers were promoted too quickly without the necessary prior and ongoing training to protect our cultural values, and to properly react when those values were violated."

He added that the CBI had "tried to find resolution in sexual harassment cases when we should have removed those offenders from our business".

A number of people were dismissed following the independent investigation by Fox Williams, the CBI said.

The group's former director general, Tony Danker, was also dismissed in April after separate allegations were made about his own conduct. These were unrelated to several other historic claims. Danker said that he felt he had been made the "fall guy" for the wider crisis faced by the organisation. After his dismissal, Danker also said he was "truly sorry" for making some colleagues "feel uncomfortable".

The details of plans for a slimmed-down lobby group are set to be revealed this morning, giving members a chance to review them ahead of an extraordinary general meeting next week.

On exploring a range of different options for the lobby group's future a CBI spokesperson said: "Following a series of member resignations, we know that the CBI will need to be smaller and refocused in the future. The board has sought advice on matters of restructuring as may be appropriate, as any responsible board would."



Peak parade John Turner, the Garland King of Castleton, is led on horseback, covered in a bell-shaped floral garland, through the Peak District village on Monday. The custom marks the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the garland representing the oak tree in which he hid after the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

PHOTOGRAPH: OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY

England braced for travel chaos as train drivers plan three days of rail strikes

Joe Middleton

Passengers are bracing for the first of three rail strikes this week as services in England come to a standstill amid a long-running dispute over pay and conditions.

Members of the drivers' union Aslef will start a 24-hour strike today and also plan to strike on Saturday.

On these days, no trains will run on networks including Avanti West Coast, Chiltern Railways, CrossCountry, East Midlands Railway, Great Northern, Southern, Southeastern, Thameslink and Northern.

Separately, about 20,000 onboard crew and station staff who are members of the RMT plan to take industrial action on Friday, but many operators will still run some trains.

The latest stoppages are likely to affect those on half-term break and passengers travelling to big events on Saturday, including the FA Cup final at Wembley and a Beyoncé concert at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

The strike comes after Aslef rejected a pay rise offer of 4% a year over two years from the Rail Delivery Group, which represents the train operating companies.

The transport minister, Huw Merriman, has urged Aslef and the RMT to put the government's "fair and reasonable" pay offer to their members.

The RMT called the pay deal from the RDG "unacceptable" and said no further proposals had been put forward for them to consider.

The union's general secretary, Mick Lynch, said: "The government is once again not allowing the Rail Delivery Group to make an improved offer that we can consider. Therefore, we have to pursue our industrial campaign to win a negotiated settlement on jobs, pay and conditions. Ministers cannot just wish this dispute away."

The RDG has warned passengers that from tomorrow until Saturday rail services will be "severely reduced with variations across the network and no services at all in some areas".

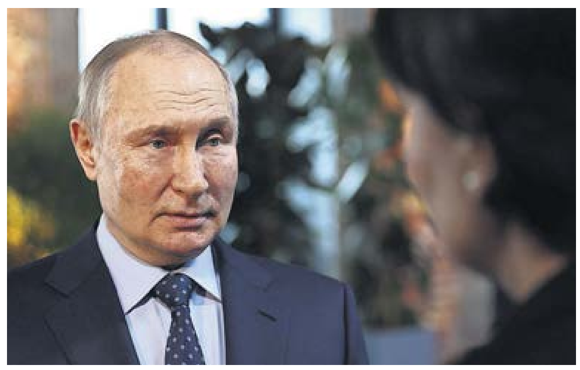
A Department for Transport spokesperson said: "These strikes have been coordinated to disrupt passengers in a week which will see major events … union leaders must do the right thing and put [the pay offer] to their members."

20,000

Onboard crew and station staff, members of the RMT, that also plan to take industrial action on Friday



Large-scale drone attack hits Moscow for first time in Russia-Ukraine war



▲ *A damaged multi-storey apartment is inspected after a reported drone attack in Moscow yesterday as President Putin praised the city's air defences*
PHOTOGRAPH: KIRILL KUDRYAVTSEV/ AFP/VIA GETTY IMAGES

Continued *from page 1*

targeted the city overnight but Russian media close to the security services wrote that the number was many times higher, with more than 30 drones participating in the attack.

Alexander Khinshtein, a prominent member of Russia's parliament, wrote on his Telegram channel that drones were shot down in five different areas of the Moscow region, including at least two that were flying over Rublyovka, home to much of Russia's political elite including Vladimir Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo state residence.

In a television appearance yesterday, Putin praised Moscow's air defences and said Kyiv was trying to scare Russians by striking civilian targets. Putin also claimed Russian forces were only striking military facilities in Ukraine using "high-precision weapons".

At least one of the drones appears to have been a Ukrainian-manufactured UJ-22, produced by the Ukrjet company. Footage appears to match images of the unmanned aerial vehicle, which Russia has claimed has been used in other attempted attacks. The UJ-22 has a claimed range of 500 miles (800km) and is able to fly for six hours.

Three drones hit residential buildings in the south-west of the city but no explosions were reported. Two people were injured in the attack, said Sergei Sobyanin, the Moscow mayor, and the buildings sustained minor damage. Video showed broken windows and a blackened facade at one address hit by a drone yesterday.

Drones have hit buildings in south-west Moscow



Russia blamed the drone attack on Ukraine – which denied responsibility – and threatened retaliation.

The Russian foreign ministry said it reserved the right to take the most "severe measures" in response. "Assurances by Nato officials that the Kyiv regime will not launch strikes deep into Russian territory prove to be completely hypocritical," the ministry said. "Russia reserves the right to take the harshest possible measures in response to the terrorist attacks by the Kyiv regime."

The Russian defence ministry said: "This morning, the Kyiv regime launched a terrorist drone attack on targets in the city of Moscow. Three of them were suppressed by electronic warfare, lost control and deviated from their intended targets. Another five drones were shot down by the Pantsir-S surface-to-air missile system in the Moscow region."

Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, said Putin had no immediate plans to address the country and claimed there was "no imminent threat to residents of Moscow and the Moscow region either".

A Ukrainian presidential aide denied Kyiv was directly involved. "Of course we are pleased to watch and predict an increase in the number of attacks. But of course we have nothing directly to do with this," Mykhailo Podolyak told the Breakfast Show YouTube channel.

The White House said yesterday that it was still gathering information about what happened in Moscow, repeating its earlier statements that it "does not support attacks inside of Russia".

Similar attacks against Ukrainian cities are a weekly and sometimes daily occurrence, with locals regularly forced to evacuate or shelter in metro tunnels. The worst strikes have hit large residential buildings or business centres and killed dozens.

Sobyanin said there had been minor damage to two residential buildings in Moscow and that people could return home once an investigation had concluded.

Andrei Vorobyov, the governor of the Moscow region, said several drones were shot down on their approach to the city.

Moscow has rarely been targeted by drone attacks since the start of the conflict, even though such attacks have become more common elsewhere in Russia. Early this month, two drones were shot down over the Kremlin in an attack blamed on Ukraine.

Several prominent officials and politicians attacked the defence ministry for allowing the drones to penetrate Moscow's airspace. They included prominent war hawks who have called for more aggressive strikes and broader mobilisation for the war in Ukraine.

Petr Tolstoy, the vice-speaker of Russia's State Duma, said: "To stop the shelling of Moscow, it is necessary to occupy Kyiv. We need to mobilise all forces and means."

"You are the ministry of defence. You haven't done anything to advance. Why the fuck do you allow these drones to hit Moscow?" shouted Yevgeny Prigozhin, who heads the Wagner mercenary group, in a voice memo. "Let your houses burn. And what should ordinary people do when drones with explosives crash into their windows?"

Vorobyov attempted to calm Muscovites unnerved by the first attack in a war that has largely played out on television for them. The Kremlin has largely sought to divert Russians from the war, calling it a small-scale military action.

"This morning, residents of some districts of the Moscow region could hear the sounds of explosions – those were our air defences at work," he wrote on social media.

Observers also noted the careful response by the Kremlin and top officials that sought to spin the effectiveness of Russia's air defences rather than the fact that Russian cities are now vulnerable.

Tatiana Stanovaya, the founder of the R Politik political analysis firm, wrote: "It is striking, of course, how much the Russian authorities … unanimously play down the significance of drone attacks on Russian cities. They are already hitting Moscow, and in the statements there is widespread pride in how well everything worked."

Other videos posted by Russians on social media revealed their shock.

"It's flying right over our house!" shouted one man as he filmed a drone gliding over suburban Moscow.

Rybar, a popular Russian military blogger close to the defence ministry, wrote: "If the purpose of the raid was to stress out the population, then the very fact of the appearance of Ukrainian drones in the sky over Moscow has already contributed to this."

Additional reporting
Peter Beaumont

'A new reality'
Muscovites wake up to war at home

Pjotr Sauer

Residents of the wealthy Rublyovka neighbourhood are used to a bit of noise. Home to sprawling gated villas belonging to Russia's political and business elites, including Vladimir Putin, the forested area west of Moscow is known for extravagant late-night parties and lavish fireworks displays.

But yesterday morning they were disturbed by something louder – the sound of drones exploding in the air. "It was like boom, boom, boom, in pretty quick succession," said Andrei, a businessman residing in Barvikha village in the heart of Rublyovka. "One of the blasts shook our house; it wasn't something we have experienced before."

Moscow and its outskirts came under attack by drones, just as Russia launched another deadly wave of airstrikes on Kyiv.

Some Muscovites who were awoken by the drones yesterday described the reported Ukrainian attack as a "logical" part of the war that the Kremlin continues to refer to as a "special military operation".

"Everyone understands that if we fire at them, the attacks might come back to us," said Dmitry, who was woken up yesterday morning by the sound of explosions while at his flat in the town of Odintsovo, near Rublyovka. He said he went to sleep after the strikes.

"Some people are upset but nothing can surprise me any more. Ukraine already hit the Kremlin before. This is a logical next step," said a security guard in Zhukovka, an elite gated community near where the strikes took place.

For others, yesterday's drone barrage felt more frightening, perhaps offering a tiny and uneven glimpse into the daily terror experienced by Ukrainians as a result of Russian strikes. A female resident of one of the apartment blocks in Moscow that were struck described hearing a powerful explosion and feeling scared.

In stark contrast to Kyiv, Moscow has so far been shielded from the devastation that Putin's invasion has inflicted.

Polls have shown that many in the capital have stopped paying attention to the war, as restaurants and bars remain jammed with Muscovites eager to enjoy the warm weather.



▲ *Police inspect the wreckage of a drone on a street in Moscow*

This apparent apathy has frustrated some of the more aggressive pro-war supporters, who renewed their calls yesterday for a broader military and economic mobilisation, steps the Kremlin has so far chosen to avoid.

Predicting future Ukrainian strikes, Alexander Khinshtein, a senior member of Russia's parliament, urged Russians to get used to "a new reality".

But early signs indicate that the Kremlin appears to be keen to play down yesterday's attacks and project a sense of normality.

Andrei Kolesnikov, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, based in Moscow, said yesterday's strikes came at a time when general anxiety in Russia about the war had been receding, despite widespread expectations in the west that Ukraine would soon launch a counteroffensive.

Kolesnikov cited recent data collected by the independent Levada-Center polling and research organisation, which found 20% of Russians had said they had felt anxiety, fear or dread over the war in Ukraine, down from 47% last summer, before the Kremlin announced a partial mobilisation drafting hundreds of thousands of soldiers to fight in Ukraine.

But, Kolesnikov said, incidents like yesterday's drone attack could have a tangible impact on Russia's attitudes towards the fighting in Ukraine.

"If the drone attack turns out to be not just an isolated incident, it will serve as a reminder that the hostilities are already in the capital and that Putin is not all-powerful," he said. "This may sway public opinion somewhat in favour of starting peace negotiations."

What drones were used in the attack, and what's the strategy?

What do we know about the attack?
The Russian authorities and media said eight drones were involved, with five shot down or disabled with jamming technology. Russian media close to the security services said more than 30 drones participated in the attack. The three drones that did strike all hit locations in south-west Moscow: a residential building, a high-rise apartment block, and another high-rise building. None caused significant damage or casualties.

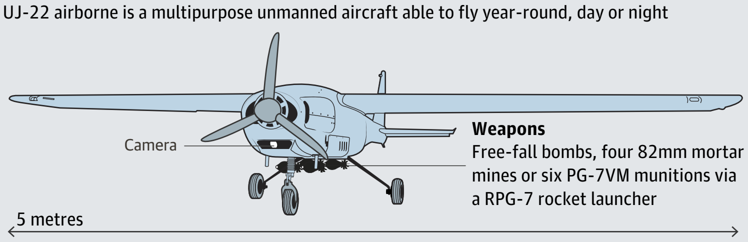
What drones were involved?
There has been speculation that at least one of the drones involved was a UJ-22 produced by the Ukrainian Ukrjet company, which Russia claims has been involved in at least one previous attack. Some other experts suggest it is another model of drone. What is clear is that Ukraine does have the capacity to launch long-range drone strikes.

Able to take off and land on a 100-metre airstrip, the UJ-22 has a claimed range of 800km and is able to fly for six hours with a payload of about 20kg, typically grenades and mines.

Are Ukrainian drone attacks becoming more ambitious?
There has been an apparent pattern of recent efforts by Kyiv to hit targets deep inside Russia. In February a UJ-22 crashed 100km from Moscow after managing to travel about 460km into Russian territory without being destroyed by Russia's air defences. In May the Kremlin was hit by two drone strikes that caused only superficial damage.

Why is Ukraine doing this now?
These attacks appear aimed at delivering a psychological impact. For many, the war has been remote from people's experiences with the bulk of recruiting and mobilisation from outlying regions. The attacks seem designed to bring the war home to Moscow, demonstrating that Ukraine can skirt air defences and that it has the capacity to strike deep inside Russia.
Peter Beaumont

Ukraine's UJ-22 airborne unmanned aircraft system
UJ-22 airborne is a multipurpose unmanned aircraft able to fly year-round, day or night



Flight range	Max speed	Max service ceiling	Max payload
800km (500 miles)	160kph (100mph)	6,000m (20,000ft)	20kg (44lbs)
Cruise speed	**Max flight time**	**Min service altitude**	**External crew**
120kph (75mph)	7 hours	50m (164ft)	4

Source: UKRJET, Military-today.com

Kyiv
One fatality in third wave of airstrikes in 24 hours

Julian Borger
Kharkiv

Kyiv came under attack for the third time in 24 hours yesterday morning, as Russia stepped up a bombing campaign apparently aimed at demoralising Ukrainians and disrupting plans for a counteroffensive.

The Ukrainian military said more than 20 Iranian-made Shahed drones had been shot down over Kyiv in the early hours of yesterday but at least one drone appears to have reached the capital, exploding in a residential area and breaking windows for tens of metres around.

One person was killed and four injured when debris from a Russian projectile fell on a Kyiv apartment block and started a fire in its upper storey. Officials warned there could be more casualties in the rubble.

The government in Kyiv said that around the country four people had been killed by Russian bombing, and that 34 people had been injured including two children. Air raid sirens sounded overnight in Kharkiv and in the central Cherkasy, Kirovohrad and Mykolayiv regions, including Kherson, to the south.

"Russia is trying to break us and break our will. To deprive peaceful citizens of sleep and prevent us, the security and defence sector, from preparing to implement important tasks," the interior minister, Ihor Klymenko, said.

In particular, Ukrainian officials say the motivation for Russia's repeated attacks is to sap Ukraine's ability to protect the troops and equipment it is preparing for a major counteroffensive.

"These missile attacks of a fairly dense frequency are aimed specifically at exhausting both our air defence forces and our physical and moral strength," Nataliya Gumenyuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine's southern military command, said.

Russia used drones for yesterday morning's attack. The previous barrage, late on Monday morning employed ballistic and cruise missiles, and the one before that, in the early hours of Monday, was a mix of missiles and drones. There have been 17 bombing raids on Kyiv so far this month.

The latest attack on Ukraine came as drones hit Moscow high-rise buildings in the first such attack since the beginning of the Kremlin's invasion of its neighbour. Ukraine made no direct comment on the attack, which would be one of its deepest and most daring strikes into Russia since the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Ukrainian defence officials said Russia was experimenting to try to find ways around air defence batteries, coming from different directions and flying low along river beds.

Manston staff fear asylum centre will be overcrowded within weeks

Rajeev Syal
Diane Taylor

A controversial asylum centre that became dangerously overcrowded last year could be overwhelmed within weeks, civil servants and union representatives have warned.

Staff at Manston processing centre spoke of a return to conditions that led to disease and violence because of the lack of "upstream accommodation" for asylum seekers who had been processed. There were also concerns about workplace safety during the removal of asbestos, sources said.

In cases that could result in payouts of millions of pounds, hundreds of asylum seekers who were illegally held at the centre in November are bringing claims against the Home Office for unlawful detention and inhumane treatment.

Manston was supposed to hold up to 1,600 people for short periods during security checks. But conditions deteriorated last autumn after numbers rose to 4,000, amid the spread of infectious diseases and the outbreak of violence.

Hopes were raised that overcrowding this year would be avoided after the immigration minister, Robert Jenrick, announced in March that plans for camps on former military sites would go ahead, as well as on barges and cruise ships. But many sites face legal challenges and local protests.

Lucy Moreton of the ISU union, which represents border force staff, said: "We are concerned about the possibility of a return of problems at Manston if the government struggles to find accommodation upstream."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "We continue to work across government to deliver cheaper and more suitable accommodation for those arriving on small boats, including through surplus military sites and vessel accommodation.

"In addition, we are committed to processing individuals through Manston as quickly as possible and have introduced residential holding rooms onsite to ensure we have sufficient capacity when there are large numbers of arrivals."



Hundreds of mortgage deals withdrawn amid interest rate concerns

Rupert Jones
Phillip Inman
Kiran Stacey

Almost 800 residential and buy-to-let mortgage deals have been pulled in the past few days by UK banks and building societies amid growing concerns over future interest rate rises.

In an echo of the crisis that engulfed the sector last autumn after the mini-budget that brought down Liz Truss, the number of residential mortgage deals has fallen by almost 7% in a week, according to the financial data provider Moneyfacts.

The data also shows that new fixed-term home loans are climbing, after last Wednesday's inflation figures moved markets to bet that the Bank of England would raise the cost of borrowing to over 5% this year.

The number of residential mortgage deals was down from 5,385 on 22 May to 5,012 yesterday morning - a reduction of 373 products.

In the buy-to-let sector, the volatility has had an even bigger impact, with the number of new landlord mortgages available dropping by more than 14% over the same period, from 2,748 deals to 2,343 - a reduction of 405 products.

Households looking for a new mortgage deal had been warned to expect 5%-plus fixed-rate deals in the coming weeks after the worse-than-expected inflation figures.

The new figures raise the prospect that the UK could be heading for a rerun of the rollercoaster period last autumn, when Kwasi Kwarteng's September mini-budget unleashed chaos in the financial markets, leading to thousands of mortgage deals being pulled and contributing to rises in the prices of many new fixed rate deals to above 6%. They also add to the urgency of calls for the BoE and the government to tackle the stubbornly high inflation at the root of the rate rises, amid warnings from some economists that it could drive the UK economy into recession next year.

Paul Dales, chief UK economist at the consultancy Capital Economics, said further interest rate rises and a contraction were needed to bring down inflation. "I don't see how we lower wages growth and bring down inflationary pressures without a recession," he said.

Financial markets are now pricing in four successive rate rises by the Bank, taking the central bank's base rate from 4.5% to 5.5% by the end of the year, though Dales forecast a peak of 5.25% and a recession in the second half of this year.

James Murray, the shadow financial secretary to the Treasury, said: "The Conservatives' 13 years of failure on the economy is being felt every month by millions of people through rising mortgage repayments, just as other costs are rising too."

Meanwhile, rates on new fixed deals are marching upwards again, having gradually fallen during the months after the mini-budget, dealing a blow to would-be homebuyers and those planning to switch to a new home-loan product.

Moneyfacts said the average rate on a new two-year fixed mortgage had crept up from 5.34% on 22 May to 5.38% yesterday morning. At the start of May the average was 5.26%.

The average rate of 5.38% is not far off the 5.43% that was reached at the start of October last year. Just a few months before that, in May 2022, the average rate stood at about 3%. Similarly, the average new five-year fixed rate had nudged up from 5.01% on 22 May to 5.05%. At the beginning of this month it was 4.97%.

Moneyfacts said in terms of residential mortgage providers, those that had pulled some of their fixed-rate mortgage deals over the past few days included Bank of Ireland UK, Halifax and several building societies. Aldermore, Foundation Home Loans and the Tipton and Coseley building society were among those that had withdrawn their entire fixed-rate ranges.

7%
Decline in the number of mortgage deals on offer in the past week, echoing the chaos of last autumn

5.38%
Average rate of a new two-year fixed mortgage as of yesterday. Twelve months ago the rate was about 3%

Skepta and Queens of the Stone Age added to Glastonbury lineup

Ben Beaumont-Thomas



The Glastonbury festival lineup includes, from left, Digga D, Skepta, Lizzo and Caroline Polachek

Queens of the Stone Age, the Chemical Brothers, Skepta, Caroline Polachek and Digga D were among the names added to the 2023 Glastonbury lineup yesterday, as the weekend's entire programme was announced.

Additions to the Pyramid stage – joining previously announced big names such as Guns N' Roses, Elton John and Lizzo – include Rick Astley opening the bill on Saturday and playing the festival for the first time; the pop singers Maisie Peters and Sophie Ellis-Bextor; and the Master Musicians of Joujouka, the Moroccan group from a small village in the Rif mountains who play a deeply involving form of drone music.

A mysterious addition to the Pyramid lineup goes by the artist name the ChurnUps, who have no online footprint and are presumably a starry secret act. Glastonbury organisers were tight-lipped about their identity, but whoever they are, they have a very high-profile placing, sandwiched between Royal Blood and Texas in the much-coveted sunset slot on Friday evening.

Queens of the Stone Age will headline the Other stage on Sunday night with Dermot Kennedy, Krept & Konan, Japanese Breakfast, the Lightning Seeds, the Hives, Ben Howard, the Unthanks, the Lathums, the Teskey Brothers and the Joy the other newly announced names for Glastonbury's second-biggest stage.

The supergroup Generation Sex, featuring Billy Idol and Tony James of Generation X, with the Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones and drummer Paul Cook, will also play on Saturday.

The rumour mill will also start churning for two high-profile "TBA" slots ion the Woodsies stage – formerly the John Peel stage – on Friday and Saturday evenings. Additions that have been announced include Caroline Polachek, Editors and Slowdive, playing before the headliners Phoenix on Sunday; a strong showing for British and Irish indie on Saturday with Shame, the Murder Capital, Working Men's Club, Wunderhorse and the Last Dinner Party now added; and Courteeners and Pale Waves joined by chart-topping drill rapper Digga D on Friday.

The Avalon stage announced a former Spice Girl in Melanie C and a former Scissor Sister in Jake Shears, as well as Laura Mvula, the Damned and more. Heavier music comes courtesy of Skindred and the supergroup Empire State Bastard among others on the Truth stage, while the Acoustic stage will host quieter fare from Richard Thompson, Steve Earle, Rickie Lee Jones and many others.

Star names for Arcadia's fire-breathing spider stage include the Chemical Brothers, MK, drum'n'bass stars including Wilkinson and Shy FX, and some exciting back-to-back sets including grime MC Skepta with Jammer, and Floating Points with Daphni.

The full lineup is now on the Glastonbury website.

Music review

A mirrorball vision of staccato riffs and bossa nova ballads

Arctic Monkeys
Ashton Gate, Bristol
★★★★★

Huw Baines



▲ *Arctic Monkeys' Alex Turner and Jamie Cook punch out the riffs at Ashton Gate stadium, Bristol*
PHOTOGRAPH: AARON PARSONS PHOTOGRAPHY

'Very good," Alex Turner exhales after delivering the final crunching note of Teddy Picker, hitting the nail on the head. The Arctic Monkeys frontman, dressed like a Laurel Canyon troubadour in a denim shirt and blazer, his shagpile barnet falling towards a pair of black-lensed aviators, has barely said another word in the opening half hour of the band's first stadium tour, preferring instead to conduct a storm of rock music that's thrilling in its brutish simplicity.

Released last autumn, the group's seventh album The Car suggested this run of shows might hit a few speed bumps. Its songs – a string-led mix of spy caper jazz-pop and needling ballads – required puzzling out, and perhaps wouldn't be suitable for venues of this size.

This meticulously paced set, though, shows that context is everything. Turner and his bandmates – guitarist Jamie Cook, bassist Nick O'Malley and the exceptional, propulsive drummer Matt Helders – start with Mardy Bum and keep their foot down. A righteously loud Don't Sit Down 'Cause I've Moved Your Chair is next, before Helders tumbles into Brianstorm's frenzied intro.

These early exchanges highlight Turner's skill as a riff writer and many of the staccato leads he shares with Cook are boisterously taken up football chant-style from stadium pitch. Following a surging The View from the Afternoon, though, Turner slips his guitar off and wanders towards the front row, a lounge lizard framed with Super 8-style lens flare on the screens either side of the stage. Four Out of Five follows, a bossa nova arrangement drawing out the recorded version's sting.

There'd Better Be a Mirrorball unfolds as the sun sets, its sweeping orchestral elements recast as psych-leaning keys, then Suck It and See has Turner reaching for the crowd like peak-ham Tom Jones, while 505 is strung out, its synth drone pushed towards Velvet Underground levels of prominence.

The staging is simple but the lighting and video work creates a mood that no confetti cannon could. During a thunderous Do I Wanna Know?, Cook is framed by deep red circles that punch out of the darkness. They pepper the latter stages with a scratchy My Propeller and a borderline euphoric Fluorescent Adolescent, calling to mind Turner's assertion that The Car was partly about "switching the 'rock band' bit on and off".

Flicking that switch, the encore is a notable success. I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor and R U Mine? set off pogoing lads, after a take on Sculptures of Anything Goes that retains its foreboding bass notes and synth stabs, retrofitted with an apocalyptic rock edge. It is rapturously received, suggesting that these new songs can be muscular stadium-fillers all on their own. Yes, very good.

Touring until 25 June

Nearly 70% of complainants in rape cases withdraw from justice system

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

Nearly 70% of complainants in rape cases dropped out of the justice system in the fourth quarter of last year, according to government data.

Amid court delays, low police convictions rates and fears about reliving the crime in court, 69.22% of serious sexual assault complainants withdrew from investigations. The figure, unearthed by Labour, compares with a 55.48% drop-out rate in 2016 and a 66.85% rate in 2021.

The number of sex offences in England and Wales reached a record high of 193,566 in England and Wales in the year ending March 2022, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Labour has increased pressure on the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, over rape conviction rates in recent weeks after a highly critical report into misogyny in the Metropolitan police by Louise Casey. The shadow justice minister, Ellie Reeves, said: "Rape trials are delayed for years, with a high rate of rapists unpunished, leaving victims powerless and traumatised."

According to the latest Ministry of Justice figures, the number of outstanding adult rape cases in crown courts in England and Wales has more than tripled in just four years, passing 2,000 for the first time.

Keir Starmer's party is planning to explore a scheme that offers free legal advice to rape survivors to drive down drop-out rates.

Trials to support rape victims in the Northumbria police region, under Labour police and crime commissioner Kim McGuinness, have reported an improvement in victims' experiences of the criminal justice system, best practice in the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) responses.

Dame Vera Baird KC, the former victims' commissioner, said 94.3% of the professionals involved in the pilot scheme favoured its national rollout.

"Independent legal advice moderates police and CPS demands for complainants' personal information, shortens investigations, supports complainants and cuts withdrawals," she said. "Tory cuts have left too few courts, too few judges, too few lawyers and too many complainants unable to put their lives on hold to wait for justice."

Labour said it would open specialist courts listing rape cases as a priority. Starmer, a former director of public prosecutions, has also promised to double the number of crown prosecutors.

2,000
The number of outstanding adult rape cases awaiting trial in crown courts in England and Wales

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Nationwide Building Society. Head Office: Nationwide House, Pipers Way, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN38 1NW.

Greenland's glacial mud could be used to trap climate-heating CO_2

Damian Carrington
Environment editor

Rock "flour" produced by the grinding under Greenland's glaciers can trap climate-heating carbon dioxide when spread on farm fields, research has shown for the first time.

Natural chemical reactions break down the rock powder and lead to CO_2 from the air being fixed in new carbonate minerals. Scientists believe measures to speed up the process, called enhanced rock weathering (ERW), could remove billions of tonnes of CO_2 from the atmosphere, helping to prevent global heating.

Soil fertility naturally depends on rock weathering to provide essential nutrients, so enhancing the process delivers an extra benefit. Spreading the Greenland rock flour on fields in Denmark, including those growing barley for the Carlsberg brewery, significantly increased yields.

Greenland's giant ice sheet produces 1bn tonnes a year of rock flour, which flows as mud from under the glaciers. This means the potential supply of rock flour is essentially unlimited, the researchers said.

The weathering process is relatively slow, taking decades to complete, but the researchers said ERW could make a meaningful difference in meeting the key target of net zero emissions by 2050. Phasing out the burning of fossil fuels remains the most critical climate action, but most scientists agree that ways of removing CO_2 from the atmosphere will also be needed to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis.

"If you want something to have a global impact, it has to be very simple," said Prof Minik Rosing at the University of Copenhagen, who was part of the research team. "You can't have very sophisticated things with all kinds of hi-tech components. So the simpler the better, and nothing is simpler than mud."

The use of mechanically ground rock for ERW is also being researched. "But unlike other sources, glacial rock flour does not need any processing," said Dr Christiana Dietzen, also at the University of Copenhagen. The rock flour weathers extremely slowly in the cold conditions in Greenland, but the process speeds up when it is spread in warmer places.

The research on the CO_2 uptake of Greenland rock flour, published in the International Journal of Greenhouse Gas Control, estimated that 250kg (550lbs) of CO_2 can be trapped per tonne of rock flour. After three years in soil in Denmark, about 8% of this had been achieved, the researchers found. The scientists also calculated that 27m tonnes of CO_2 could be captured if all farmland in Denmark was spread with the rock flour, an amount similar to the country's total annual CO_2 emissions.

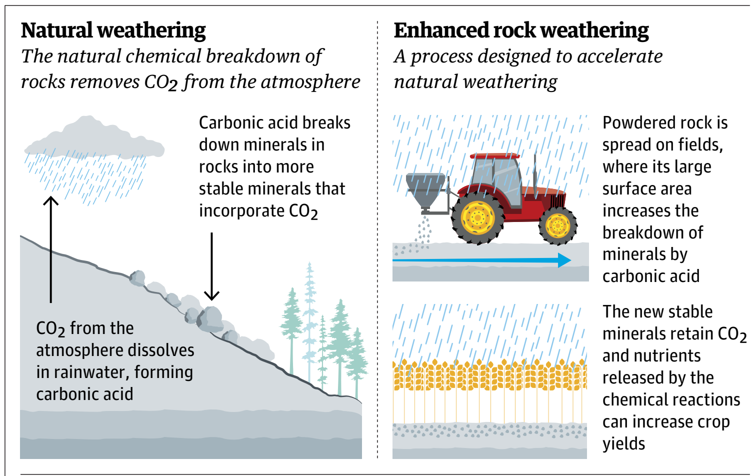
Other ERW research has used mechanically ground basalt. Prof David Beerling at the University of Sheffield said basalt had significant advantages over glacial rock flour. Its chemical composition absorbs CO_2 faster and may increase crop yields by more. Basalt is also widely available close to many farming areas.

"We need all the weapons we can muster in the fight against climate change and my sense is that glacial rock flour could be a useful one," Beerling said. "But it is not a gamechanger."

However, the rock flour is much finer than the ground basalt and so exposes more surface area to weathering.

"I don't think it has to be one [type of rock dust] or the other. I think there's probably room for both," said Rosing.

Other proposed ways of pulling CO_2 from the atmosphere include using technology to capture it directly from the air, or growing energy crops, burning them to produce electricity and then burying the CO_2 emissions. The 2020 study suggested ERW would be less expensive than either - and, unlike energy crops, it does not compete with food for land.



Source: Guardian research



▲ *The Greenland ice sheet produces 1bn tonnes a year of rock flour*



Representative Example	Duration of Agreement	Upfront Cost	Monthly Device Payment	Credit Amount	Total Amount Payable	Interest Rate	Representative APR	Device Cash Price	Airtime Plan until March 2024	Airtime Plan April 2024 - March 2025	Airtime Plan April 2025 - March 2026
iPad 9th Gen 64GB	48 months	£20	£9.80	£470.06	£490.06	0%	0%	£490.06	£7.00	£7.00 + RPI announced in Feb 2024 = Price A	Price A + RPI announced in Feb 2025

***Each year your Airtime Plan will be increased by the Retail Price Index (RPI) rate of inflation announced in February plus 3.9%. If RPI is negative, we'll only apply the 3.9%. You'll see this increase on your April 2024 bill onwards. See o2.co.uk/prices.** £9.80 Device Plan for 48 months and £7 monthly rolling Airtime Plan. £20 upfront. £232 saving consists of £40.94 discount applied to the device plan (total cost of device was £531.00 now £490.06) and £192 saving achieved by £4 per month discount on the 1GB Airtime Plan for 48 months. Discount applies until you change tariff, leave or upgrade. Data allowances must be used within the months and cannot be carried over. Subject to availability. Ends 31st May 2023. **48 Months O2 Refresh custom plans:** Direct purchases only. Pay the cash price for your device or spread the cost over 3 to 48. Like new devices available for 3 to 36 months. The device cost will be the same whatever you choose. There may be an upfront cost. You need a monthly rolling Airtime Plan as long as you have a Device Plan. Pay off your Device Plan at any time and you can choose to keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade or leave. If your Airtime Plan ends for any reason you will need to pay your Device Plan in full. If you are in the first 24 months of your Device Plan and you cancel your Airtime Plan you will have to pay the remainder of your Device Plan in full. After 24 months you can keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or end it without affecting your Device Plan. Get up to 6 months' Apple TV+ when you buy an eligible iOS device on a Plus Plan from O2 ("Qualifying Purchase"). Redeem directly with Apple via redemption code provided to you within 7 days of Qualifying Purchase. All participants must redeem by 9th November 2023. Redemption terms apply. O2 provides a 3-month subscription (a "Subscription Period"), depending on which available device or offer is chosen, added to any existing or new trial period of up to 3 months provided by Apple directly. You must set up Apple account and agree to Apple's terms of use. You'll be automatically enrolled on to a paid monthly subscription directly with Apple at the end of the relevant Subscription Period. You cannot benefit from more than one subscription period with O2. Tariff eligibility criteria applies which includes being a UK resident and 18+. No cash or alternatives. Lost redemption codes will not be replaced. Offer may be withdrawn or amended at any time. Internet access required. **For how to claim and full terms:** o2.co.uk/termsandconditions/rewards. UK Data Only. Devices subject to availability. 0% APR. Finance subject to status and credit checks. 18+. Direct Debit. Credit provided by Telefónica UK Ltd, SL1 4DX. Telefónica UK is authorised and regulated by the FCA for consumer credit and insurance. Terms apply, see o2.co.uk/terms

Government accused of Covid inquiry cover-up

Continued *from page 1*

government's most senior lawyer, Sir James Eadie, which suggested officials had been withholding evidence based on political sensitivity rather than just personal details.

It reported that the advice said: "We would be concerned by any approach which appeared to concede the principle that Cabinet collective responsibility material should be disclosed as a matter of course."

The advice added: "That material will concern a number of ministers still in office, and potentially in the same office. On any view, it will be extremely recent and of the greatest political sensitivity."

The government does not routinely retain WhatsApp messages between ministers and officials unless they contain government decisions. No 10 refused to comment on whether Sunak and current members of the government had been asked to hand over correspondence and documentation in full.

John Bell, a leading government adviser during the pandemic, said Hallett should be able to see communications between senior government figures. He added: "First of all, give her access. These are people who are working for the public. If there's something deeply private and personal they shouldn't have been using their official context for that. This should all be accessible to the inquiry. But then the inquiry should be a bit careful that they don't get sucked into a load of sideshows which are not really central to what they are trying to do, but they'll be able to work that out."

Others to question the government's actions including Conservative MP Caroline Nokes, who said the apparent "reluctance" by the government to hand over what was requested "seems a nonsense".

Speaking to TalkTV, she added as much contemporary evidence as possible was vital to ensuring the inquiry could look into serious issues about the handling of the pandemic. She said Hallett "doesn't look like a woman who's about to roll over … probably rightly so" and there would be "less pain for the government if they hand [the files] over quickly".

Labour said the situation had the "whiff of a cover-up" while the Lib Dems said this "dog ate my homework-type excuse from the government simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny". Susie Flintham, a spokesperson for the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice campaign group, said the lengths the Cabinet Office was going to prevent Johnson's material being shared "should alarm everyone", adding: "This inquiry needs to get to the facts if it is to learn lessons to help save lives in the next pandemic. So why are the Cabinet Office standing in their way?"



▲ *Boris Johnson has 'no objection' to the inquiry getting the information*

Bob Kerslake, a former head of the civil service, told the BBC there was "some cover-up going on here to save embarrassment of ministers", as well as the Cabinet Office in his view wrongly "fighting for a principle of confidentiality".

Jonathan Jones, a former government lawyer, suggested the government's actions were unlikely to work because Hallett's inquiry had wide powers. "It might be viewed as an attempt to avoid handing over material the government would prefer not to, but it's not likely to work because ultimately it will be for the courts to decide," he said.

Sunak said yesterday the government was cooperating fully and No 10 denied it was a cover-up, with the Cabinet Office highlighting that 55,000 documents, 24 personal witness statements, and eight corporate statements given to the Covid inquiry. The government says handing over unredacted notebooks and messages would be an affront to the privacy of officials and ministers, as well as hindering policy discussion.

Who will blink first? Standoff with the Cabinet Office

What has the inquiry asked for?
A vast cache of documents was requested by Heather Hallett, the chair of the public inquiry into the government's handling of Covid. On 28 April, she ordered the Cabinet Office to hand over all messages on the phones of Johnson and a No 10 aide, Henry Cook, concerning the pandemic. These included WhatsApp messages sent from and to other senior figures in government – stretching from the then chancellor, Rishi Sunak, to special advisers including Dominic Cummings and officials all the way up to cabinet secretary level. A bundle of about 24 notebooks kept by Johnson was also requested.

Lady Hallett originally set a deadline of 12 May, but the Cabinet Office pushed back. A new deadline of 4pm yesterday was set, but that has been extended to 4pm tomorrow.

Why did the government object?
Although Hallett specifically said she wanted the "entire contents" of the documents, the Cabinet Office disagreed with what information was relevant to her inquiry. Normally communications between ministers – which in previous generations would have been committed to a letter or fax – stay secret. The "30-year rule" ensures they would not see the light of day until long after several administrations have come and gone. It is argued that this gives ministers and officials the privacy to discuss and debate policies.

A public inquiry has rights to request more contemporaneous information, but it must be judged to be "potentially relevant". The Cabinet Office disagreed with Hallett that information it redacted was relevant. It is also nervous about losing control of its ability to guarantee the confidentiality of the contents, although the Covid inquiry will not necessarily publish every piece of evidence it receives.

How could the impasse be broken?
The Cabinet Office admitted at the last minute before yesterday's deadline that it did not have Johnson's notebooks or his WhatsApp messages.

Hallett has given it two more days to comply. She has also demanded a senior civil servant give a statement setting out further facts. Hallett wants the Cabinet Office to produce any correspondence with Johnson and his office about the notebooks and WhatsApps, and say whether it has been in possession of the notebooks at any time over the past three months. She also wants answers as to whether the messages by Johnson were on a personal or government device.

Downing Street said the Cabinet Office does not currently have the material but admitted it had previously been given to government lawyers. Johnson's spokesperson said he had "no objection" to the documents being passed to the inquiry.

If the Cabinet Office resists doing so, then it could take legal action to challenge the inquiry chair's ruling. Jonathan Jones, a former head of the government legal department, said if Hallett does not cave in, then she and Whitehall mandarins could reach a compromise so that some information is handed over while other bits remain redacted.

Alternatively, the inquiry could start criminal proceedings against the government or seek an enforcement order from the high court. Aubrey Allegretti



Millennials Why young voters are turning their backs on the Tories

Heather Stewart

'I do think it is pretty obvious really." After new research suggested millennials believe the Conservatives deserve to lose the next election, former Tory cabinet minister David Willetts says the answer lies with the economy.

Polling for thinktank Onward, whose director, Sebastian Payne, hopes to become a Conservative MP, found that 62% of 25- to 40-year-olds believe the party deserves to lose the next election.

Unlike their forebears, this generation does not seem to be shifting to the right as they age. Willetts says that is because they have been denied the stake in society that previous cohorts were able to achieve at the same age.

"The process of spreading the property-owning democracy – the old Tory slogan of young people getting started on the housing ladder, getting a place and a decent pension, having a stake in society – that progress is slower, more difficult and more precarious than at any point since the war," he says.

Willetts wrote the 2010 book The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future and Why They Should Give it Back.

Since then generational divisions have become even wider. Recent Resolution Foundation research showed that the long-running housing boom, aided by quantitative easing and rock-bottom interest rates, has meant baby boomers now own more than half of Britain's wealth as opposed to 8% for millennials.

And while just 10% of family units headed by a baby boomer were living in the private rented

▼ *Rishi Sunak, being interviewed yesterday. His party is said to be losing its appeal to younger voters*
PHOTOGRAPH: RORY ARNOLD/10 DOWNING STREET



sector at age 30, for millennials of the same age, it was 40%.

As well as the failure to liberalise planning rules and ensure more housing is built, Willetts points to policies such as cuts to working-age benefits, in contrast with the generous protection of state pensions, as examples of policies that have worsened the "pinch".

"In my experience, young people are not plotting Marxist revolution in Latin America – what they want is to own a place and have a decent job," says Willetts. "They're not so fundamentally radical that a sensible Conservative party couldn't appeal to them. But the more difficult we make the process, the harder it is for them to get a stake in society and the less likely they are to become Tory."

Much of his analysis is echoed in a very different part of the political spectrum by James Meadway, director of thinktank the Progressive Economy Forum and a former adviser to Labour MP John McDonnell.

"Effectively government policy has been geared towards making sure that house prices stay up while at the same time it has been difficult to get a mortgage," he says. "That's great if you own a house, but it's been pretty terrible if you're trying to buy a house. You're forced into the private rental market, which is hideously underregulated and generally terrible."

Meadway argues that today's labour market has also contributed to millennials' malaise. "From the mid-1990s a lot of graduates could come out of university and go straight into a reasonably secure job with prospects of something that looked like a career. And since 2008 that's not happened: you've had this profusion of zero-hour contracts, insecure work, part-time work – and younger workers have ended up with these things."

The Onward report sought to draw comfort from the fact that millennials preferred low taxes to high taxes and believed big business could provide opportunities, suggesting this meant they were "shy capitalists" ripe for a Conservative message.

But Prof Will Jennings, an elections expert at Southampton University, argues that younger voters may also be alienated by other aspects of the government's stance – on migration, for example. He argues that they are not necessarily "fully signed-up woke warriors and social justice activists" but "it's the nature of the broad rhetoric which suggests to them that the government is not standing for their sort of values".

A Labour strategist goes further, arguing that picking fights with social liberals is a deliberate choice by the government. "You can't have Suella Braverman as home secretary and say: 'We're serious about the concerns of people aged 25 to 40', because it is almost designed to anger them. That's not a flaw – it's the model," they said.

Perhaps nowhere has that been more true in recent years than on Brexit. Two-thirds of millennials voted for remain compared with just a third of boomers, but they have found themselves hit just as hard, if not harder, by its economic impact at a time when the Tories have been flying the flag for leave.

"You could argue that this is where the economic dimension and the cultural dimension blur," says Jennings. "There was a big generational gap in Brexit voting. That is now inflicting economic drag, and that's being felt by a generation that already was facing a pretty tough economic deal."

> ***Young people are not plotting Marxist revolution – they want a decent job***
>
> **David Willetts**
> *Former Tory minister*

Leaseholds
Experts on law changes have not met in year

Kiran Stacey
Political correspondent

An expert committee set up to advise ministers on how to change Britain's archaic homeownership laws has not met for over a year, the Guardian can reveal, as campaigners warn the issue is slipping down the government's agenda.

The Commonhold Council – a panel of 11 people from the property industry, the legal profession and academia – was convened in 2021 as ministers promised sweeping reforms to the leasehold system.

Last week Rachel Maclean, the housing minister, reassured MPs during a Commons debate that the council met "regularly" and was working closely with ministers. Information released to the campaigner Martin Keegan under the Freedom of Information Act, however, shows it has not met since last April – something one member blamed on successive changes in government.

The Guardian revealed earlier this month that Michael Gove had watered down his promise to abolish the "feudal" leasehold system as he was under pressure from Downing Street. Now campaigners warn the lack of council meetings is another sign ministers are rowing back from the bold reform agenda they outlined earlier this year.

Harry Scoffin, the founder of the anti-leasehold campaign group Commonhold Now, said: "The Tories' electoral offering to millennial voters is coming under immense scrutiny, so it is disappointing to learn that the government's flagship homeownership body hasn't met in over a year."

Martin Boyd, the chair of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and a council member, said: "A number of meetings have been cancelled due to many changes of housing ministers, but members of the Commonhold Council continue to work with officials on aspects of the proposals."

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities did not respond to requests for comment.

About 10 million Britons own homes through leasehold, a system that can leave homeowners facing steep bills for building maintenance, service charges and lease extensions.

Leasehold is common among young people, given it is often used in blocks of flats. Some Tories see reforming the system as key to winning back support among under-50s.

Gove has repeatedly criticised the leasehold system and told the Sunday Times in January he would announce its abolition by the end of the year.

The housing secretary is due to make a major speech in the coming weeks where he will outline a package of leasehold reforms to be included in the king's speech this year.

Government sources have told the Guardian the reforms will include capping ground rents, banning excessive legal charges and giving leaseholders more power over who manages their buildings. They will not include the outright abolition of the system, even for new buildings, after No 10 warned it could not be achieved in time for the next election.

Those close to Gove say that the plan amounts to a "path towards" outright abolition.

Scotland
UK ministers 'sabotaged' recycling plan

Severin Carrell
Scotland editor

Scottish ministers are poised to accept a UK government ultimatum over a controversial can and bottle recycling scheme after ministers in London said it had to be watered down significantly.

Lorna Slater, the minister overseeing a Scottish scheme to charge a 20p deposit for bottles and cans, accused her UK counterparts of "deliberate sabotage" after they demanded that Scotland drop plans to include glass bottles.

The UK government said it would allow the Scottish scheme to go ahead under the UK's post-Brexit internal trade rules if it aligned with plans for a similar scheme in England that would only cover plastic bottles and cans.

Slater told MSPs yesterday that the UK government's ultimatum meant tens of millions of glass bottles in Scotland would now not be recycled and would instead be littered or thrown into general waste at significant environmental cost.

It would also add to the scheme's costs and breach the Conservatives' manifesto promise in 2019 to include glass in pan-UK deposit return schemes (DRS).

She said it was more evidence of the Tories' "scorched earth" attacks on Holyrood's right to independently set policies for Scotland.

"We are now being forced to examine whether the deliberate sabotage by the UK government leaves us something we can make work," Slater told MSPs.

"We will need some time to go through the detail of the UK government decision and conditions and I will update parliament on next steps."

Maurice Golden, a Scottish Tory MSP who has championed deposit return schemes, accused Slater of using the UK government intervention as an excuse for a constitutional battle instead of accepting that the Scottish scheme had been badly executed.

"Lorna Slater has come to parliament today not to update us on DRS but to indulge in an anti-UK rant," he said. "She would rather pick a fight with the UK government than support a scheme that works for everyone. She has traded her environmentalism for nationalism."

Tourists turn up at family's home after travel site 'scam'

Mabel Banfield-Nwachi

A woman has spoken of her frustration over tourists turning up on her doorstep after her home was mistakenly listed on an online travel agency.

Karin Arsenius, 37, who lives in Plumstead, south-east London, with her two children and partner, said more than 20 unexpected tourists had arrived at her home expecting to find the accommodation they had reserved on Booking.com.

In the past month, people had turned up from countries including Algeria, Canada, India and the US. Arsenius said the ordeal had been "frustrating" and she was considering legal action against the website.

"We just need it to stop somehow," Arsenius told the BBC. "It is very frustrating."

Booking.com said it had apologised and removed the listing.

People had booked accommodation that listed the address as a flat in Greenwich. Arsenius said it appeared that her street's postcode had been used for the bookings on the travel website, and her house was beneath the pin drop on the map provided.

Arsenius said she had to make up beds in her sitting room for three women from Argentina after they were unable to find alternative accommodation one night.

"They had nowhere to go and we tried all the local hotels, but everything was booked out," Arsenius told the BBC.

She added: "There was nothing free so in the end we said: 'We're not comfortable with just letting you go out in the night so let's just make up some beds in the living room and you can just stay here.'

"But it shouldn't ever have got that far. It should have been taken care of, even if Booking.com is put out."

A Booking.com spokesperson said "scams are a battle many industries are facing against unscrupulous fraudsters".

In a statement to the BBC, the company said: "This property has been removed from our site and all customers affected were contacted by our customer service team to apologise and offer any support required, and we extend our sincere apologies to the homeowner."



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Lawsuit challenges Delta's $1bn claim to be 'carbon-neutral airline'

Patrick Greenfield

Delta Air Lines is facing a lawsuit over its $1bn carbon neutrality claim, which plaintiffs say is "false and misleading" as it relies on offsets that do little to mitigate global heating.

In February 2020, the US airline announced plans to go carbon neutral, pledging $1bn to mitigate all greenhouse gas emissions from its business worldwide over the next decade. It included plans to purchase carbon credits generated from conserving rainforest, wetlands and grasslands along with decreasing the use of jet fuel and increasing plane efficiency.

The new legal action, filed in California yesterday, targets Delta's statement that it is "the world's first carbon-neutral airline", a claim it has made in adverts, LinkedIn posts, in-flight napkins and comments by company executives, according to the lawsuit.

The class-action lawsuit says Delta's carbon neutrality claim is demonstrably false as it heavily relies on junk offsets that do nothing to counteract the climate crisis. It alleges that customers would have purchased Delta tickets believing they had no impact on the environment, and many would not have bought them without the claim.

Delta has not responded to a request for comment by the Guardian.

"The words 'carbon neutral' are so provocative," says Krikor Kouyoumdjian, a partner with the legal firm Haderlein and Kouyoumdjian, which is bringing the case. "When companies say: 'Don't worry about our emissions, they're sorted', they are communicating complacency. They are letting consumers pay to feel better and not have to worry about the impact of their consumption. But that is counterfactual to reality. It is not something that you can pay away."

> *'Companies are letting consumers pay to feel better and not have to worry about the impact of their consumption'*
>
> **Krikor Kouyoumdjian**
> *Lawyer*

The case argues that there is a market premium for green products and that Delta has profited from a misleading environmental claim. It cites scientific and journalistic evidence that there are deep flaws with carbon credits from the unregulated voluntary market that Delta has purchased for its environmental claims.

In January, a nine-month investigation by the Guardian, the German weekly Die Zeit and the investigative group SourceMaterial found Verra rainforest credits used by Disney, Shell, Gucci and other big corporations were largely worthless, and often based on stopping the destruction of rainforests that were not threatened. The lawsuit against Delta mentions the investigation. Verra strongly disputed the findings.

Haderlein and Kouyoumdjian said they want the company to drop the carbon neutrality claim and explain the full scale of the pollution it causes.

"The voluntary carbon-offset market cannot meaningfully guarantee carbon neutrality from a company in the way it's currently being operated. The market is replete with severe methodological errors that appear both intentional and unintentional. In our opinion, it's frankly reckless to predicate a company's ESG [environmental, social and governance] strategy on climate change on the basis of the purchase of these offsets," says lawyer Jonathan Haderlein.

At the time Delta launched its plans to go carbon neutral in 2020, its chief executive, Ed Bastian, said: "There's no challenge we face that is in greater need of innovation than environmental sustainability, and we know there is no single solution. We are digging deep into the issues, examining every corner of our business, engaging experts, building coalitions, fostering partnerships and driving innovation."

The lawsuit comes amid a wider regulatory crackdown on green claims in the UK and Europe.

A judge will now decide whether to progress the case.

New laws for vaping mooted to deter sale to children

Rowena Mason
Whitehall editor

Ministers are considering further new vaping laws such as a ban on colourful branding or flavours to deter their sale to children, amid calls for plain packaging to be extended.

No 10 said the government was considering "further steps" on vaping, with a call for evidence due to close next week. The government announced yesterday that it was closing a loophole in the law that allowed companies to give away free samples to children, amid concerns that usage of vapes among under-18s has been on the rise.

A Whitehall source said the government "hasn't ruled out" the idea of plain packaging for vaping and is exploring a number of further measures. Speaking to broadcasters at a lab in Kent, Sunak said the government would take "further action" to regulate the market and promotion of vapes if necessary.

Asked whether he would ban the marketing of vapes to children, he said: "As we have seen here today at this lab, there are a range of products which are clearly not designed for adults. They are designed to appeal to children in the way that they are marketed, promoted, the flavours they use.

"That's why at the moment we are asking for people's views on that and that may well be one of the steps that we take to change how we regulate the market and promotion of vapes.

"They shouldn't be deliberately targeting children, that's illegal. If we need to take further action to do that, that's what we will l do."

Asked whether Rishi Sunak backed plain packaging for vapes, similar to that for cigarettes, his spokesperson said there may be "future action that we choose to take".

ASH, the action on smoking and health charity, said the ban on free samples was welcome but a "baby step, not the tough action that's needed". Deborah Arnott, chief executive of ASH, also called for a prohibition on "branding on vapes appealing to children, such as sweet names and bright colours".

"The most important immediate step the government could take now is to put a tax on the cheap disposables which are the vape of choice for children, as well as being bad for the environment," she said.

She added the most popular disposable vape, Elf Bar, can be bought for as little as £2.99 and tax of £5 per disposable vape would make them much less affordable for children. Javed Khan, who led a review of smoking for the government, told Times Radio that plainer packaging was an "obvious" next step.

"Vaping should be promoted for those adults who currently smoke because it's a much less risky activity than smoking nicotine-based cigarettes," he said. "But at the same time, a large chunk of my report talked about the risk of vaping to young people, and set out a whole list of recommendations about what the government needs to do to reduce the likelihood of young people illegally using vape products."

One of the recommendations was closing the loophole on free samples, but others included considering banning the online sale of vapes, banning cartoon characters or images appealing to young people from vaping products, and reviewing the way flavours are described – or even the flavours themselves – to ensure vapes do not appeal to young people.

It also called for an updated school health education curriculum to talk about the risks of vaping and its age restrictions.



▼ *Young people vaping in London. No 10 says it is considering a ban on colourful branding and flavours*
PHOTOGRAPH: TOLGA AKMEN/EPA

The vape debate Aid to quitting or a health risk?

In the UK, vaping has long been valued as a smoking cessation tool and it is easy to purchase vapes, but other countries are taking tougher stances. Australia has banned recreational vaping and vapes are now only available on prescription; the Netherlands has banned flavoured vapes; and France is considering a ban on disposable vapes.

However, Peter Hajek, a professor of clinical psychology at Queen Mary University of London, said vaping represented the "best chance we ever had of getting rid of cancer, lung disease and heart disease caused by smoking". He is sceptical about some of the debate on children vaping, which he views as teenage experimentation (daily vaping is rare among those who have never smoked). "The main effect has been in deflecting young nicotine seekers from smoking," he said, noting that smoking among young people had declined "significantly faster" in the UK and US, where regulation on vaping was looser, than in Australia.

Making vapes prescription-only while cigarettes are still sold in shops could send a confusing message about harm, says the campaign group Action on Smoking and Health (Ash). "[It] could even lead some vapers to go back to smoking," said its deputy chief executive, Hazel Cheeseman.

Ash and many experts believe that although a ban is not the answer, there needs to be stricter regulation around disposable vapes, including taxes to make them more expensive.

Prof Jamie Brown, the director of the tobacco and alcohol research group at University College London, said a balance must be struck between "maximising the opportunities for adults to quit and minimising [the] risk of people who have never smoked, especially children, using them".

But some health experts are concerned by the shortage of clinical studies on the impact of vaping and the emerging evidence of its long-term risks.

Deirdre Gilpin, a senior lecturer at Queen's University in Belfast, said: "Vaping is perceived by many as a safer alternative to smoking. However, is 'safer' the same as 'safe'?" Rachel Hall



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Vote to close 167-year-old Yorkshire school with one pupil angers community

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

A 167-year-old village primary school in North Yorkshire with just one pupil is to be closed, with opponents claiming it has been the victim of a "managed wind-down".

In 2021 there were 15 pupils at Skelton Newby Hall C of E school in the village of Skelton-on-Ure, near Ripon, which has had declining pupil numbers for several years. Now it has just one on its roll, who is taught elsewhere.

No first-preference applications have been made for the next school year and no pupils have been allocated a place there, a report to North Yorkshire county council said. If it did reopen in September it would probably be a school with no pupils.

15
Number of pupils at Skelton Newby Hall in 2021, a year after Ofsted rated it as 'requires improvement'

Yesterday a meeting of North Yorkshire's executive unanimously voted to close the school despite arguments by the parish council that it should be retained to join the burgeoning forest school movement, which focuses on unstructured play.

Guy Critchlow, the chair of Skelton cum Newby parish council, said government guidance was that decision-makers should presume against the closure of rural schools.

He said the school would be needed as 800 houses targeting young families were being built nearby and other primary schools were at capacity or near capacity.

The parish council claims there have been failures of management and governance of the school leading to the falling pupil numbers. Critchlow said there had been a "managed wind-down".

A report to councillors said school governors felt they had been active in trying to raise pupil numbers, including the distribution of flyers to new builds in the area.

But Critchlow said: "Despite what is stated in council documents, our school has not been marketed to the local area." The flyers may, he said, "have ended up in a hedge somewhere".

The council's Conservative leader, Carl Les, said decisions to close primary schools were always sad ones. Other councillors said they could see no other option.



▲ *Opponents of the plan to close the primary school claim it has been a victim of a 'managed wind-down'* PHOTOGRAPH: SKELTON NEWBY HALL

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2020, when it was judged as "requires improvement". That, one respondent to a consultation process said, "added to the exodus of children".

Officials in their report said there "appears to be no reasonable prospect of recovery for the school".

Greg White, a North Yorkshire councillor, said: "A decision to close a school is really an unpleasant one to have to make. But this isn't a difficult decision because there are no pupils – and we can't spend money on schools that don't have pupils."

He said the building could become a school again if there were a need.

Energy vouchers left uncashed as deadline nears

Alex Lawson

Households on prepayment meters face missing out on up to £130m of support for their energy bills if they do not redeem government vouchers before they expire in a month's time.

Under the energy bills support scheme, which runs until 30 June, all households are entitled to discounts of up to £400 on their bills.

Those on direct debits and smart prepayment meters received the payments automatically, but those on analogue prepay devices were sent vouchers by post or email and have to take them to a post office or PayPoint vendor for the cash to be credited.

The government said that 83% of those vouchers, worth either £66 or £67, had been claimed. Of the 11.6m vouchers issued by suppliers, with a total value of £780m, only 9.7m – or £650m worth – have been cashed in.

Since the scheme's launch last autumn, data has shown that between a fifth and a quarter of prepay vouchers have not been redeemed.



River Wye's health status downgraded after decline in wildlife

Helena Horton
Environment reporter

The River Wye's health status has been downgraded by Natural England, as wildlife charities accuse the government of failing to stop farming pollution harming the waterway.

The government nature watchdog has updated the status of the river from "unfavourable-improving" to "unfavourable-declining", meaning its condition is poor - and worsening.

The assessment shows the river, which flows for 155 miles (250km) from mid-Wales to the Severn estuary in England, has experienced declines in key species such as the Atlantic salmon and white-clawed crayfish.

Previous studies have linked its decline to intensive chicken farming on the catchment. This is because the poultry reared in the area produce large amounts of manure, which contains nutrients including phosphorus. Much of this is spread on the land, which can result in the phosphorus entering the river.



▲ *Pollution in the River Wye is linked to intensive poultry farming*

> ***'That the Wye is in even worse condition comes as no surprise'***
>
> **Joan Edwards**
> *The Wildlife Trusts*

The Wildlife Trusts, which manages nature reserves across the Wye catchment, has expressed concern at the downgrading of its status.

It is calling for ministers in England and Wales to place an immediate policy moratorium on any new or extended intensive livestock production units (poultry, cattle and pig) in the Wye catchment.

It is also asking for farmers and supermarkets to work with nature charities to put an end to the pollution, and for farmers in the area to be rewarded for providing public goods and helped to diversify into regenerative and sustainable production methods which cause less pollution.

Joan Edwards, the director of public affairs at the Wildlife Trusts, said: "That the Wye is in even worse condition now will come as no surprise to the people that love and live near it. But this new admission represents a shocking failure by the agencies and authorities in Wales and England that are supposed to protect this once beautiful river … The authorities must enforce the law wherever the causes of pollution are clear."

Thérèse Coffey, the environment secretary, said: "The River Wye is clearly struggling and it is vital that we turn the tide on its decline. As I set out in our plan for water, we need local plans … community by community to tackle issues that are affecting water quality."

MPs 'to question ITV leaders' over Schofield's affair with colleague

Vivian Ho

MPs are reportedly planning to question ITV executives over the former This Morning presenter Phillip Schofield's affair with a younger male colleague.

The Prince's Trust has also said it has dropped Schofield as an ambassador. "We have agreed with him that it is no longer appropriate to work together," a spokesperson for the charity said yesterday.

The Telegraph said that members of the House of Commons digital, culture, media and sport select committee will use next week's televised session to question executives after ITV said it had investigated "rumours of a relationship" between Schofield and the employee as early as 2020.

At the time, the affair was "categorically and repeatedly denied" by both parties, ITV said in a statement.

Schofield left ITV on Friday and has admitted lying over what he said was an "unwise, but not illegal" affair that took place while he was still married to his wife, Stephanie Lowe. He has also been dropped by his agency.

Former This Morning resident doctor Ranj Singh has since said that This Morning had a "toxic" culture mired in bullying and discrimination.

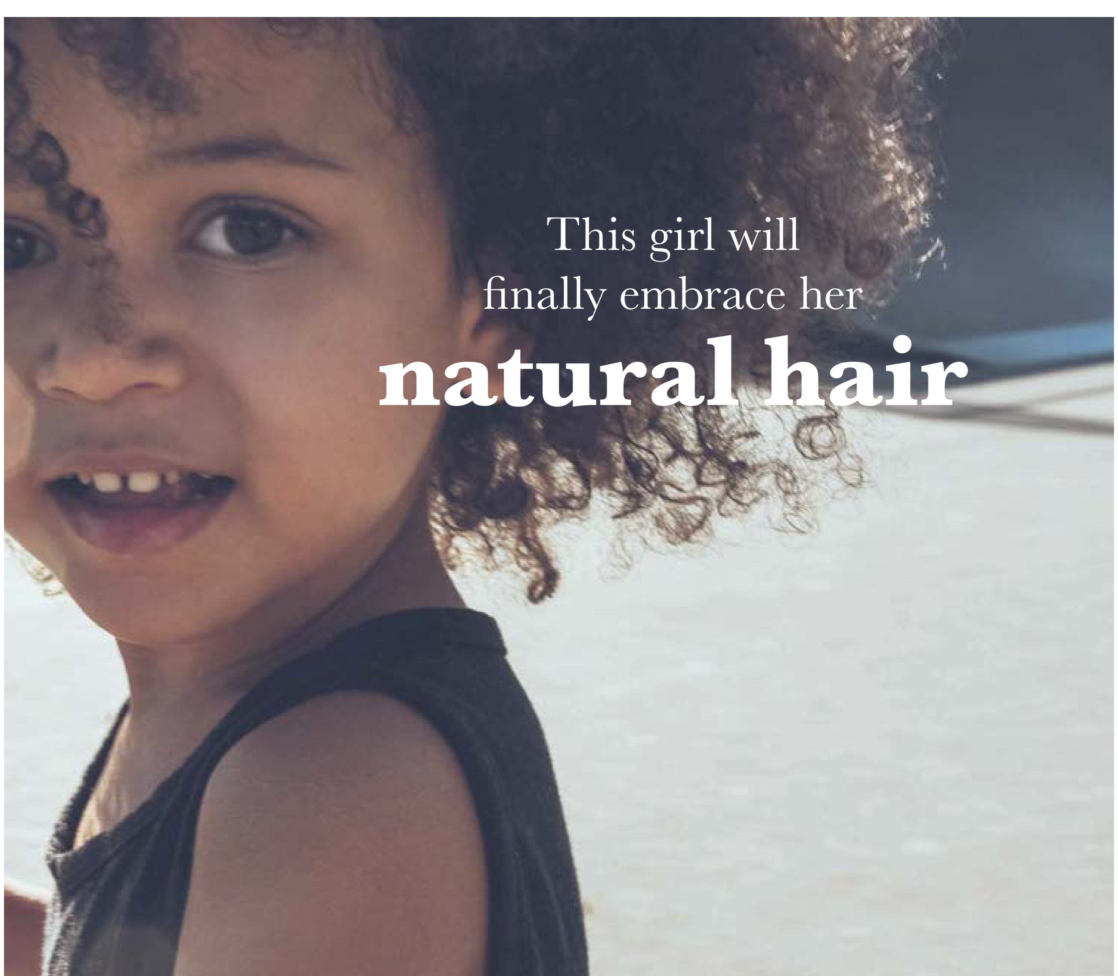
"I genuinely loved and valued working there. However, over time, I grew increasingly worried about how things were behind the scenes and how people, including myself, were being treated," Singh said. "I didn't know the truth about what was going on with Phillip, but I do know the issues with TM [This Morning] go far beyond him. It takes more than one person to create a culture."

Schofield said "there was no toxicity" in his two decades as host of the show, and appeared to blame his departure on "the same handful of people with a grudge".

Additional reporting **Agencies**



▲ *Phillip Schofield rejected claims that This Morning has a toxic culture*



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'A revelation' From Darcy to dastardly, how Succession star Macfadyen soared to the top



▲ *Macfadyen met his wife, Keeley Hawes, centre, on the set of Spooks*

Caroline Davies

As Succession fans still reel from the relentless, head-spinning denouement of a plot which has gripped viewers for four seasons, one thing was indisputable after the show's final episode: this was Matthew Macfadyen at his stellar best.

So compulsive was he as the venal, unctuous, morally moribund Tom Wambsgans, it is hard to reconcile with his past role as period drama leading man Mr Darcy in Joe Wright's Pride & Prejudice.

Yet, from Shakespeare to Austen to "lip balm Tom Wamb, lubing up his lips" and delivering immortal Tomisms such as: "Buckle-up, fucklehead!", Macfadyen has been the consummate shapeshifter in a hugely successful career.

Succession has cemented the global star status of the English-born actor, whom those in the UK have treasured since he first came to prominence as the spymaster Tom Quinn in the TV series Spooks from 2002 to 2004.

It was on the set of Spooks that he met his wife, the actor Keeley Hawes, who had recently married the father of her baby son. "Matthew just came straight out with it and said 'I love you' in the rain one day," Hawes said recently. "I thought, 'Oh dear, here we go.'"

The two starred together in the recent ITV series Stonehouse, based on a true story, with Macfadyen as the hapless former MP John Stonehouse who attempted to fake his own drowning, and Hawes as his wife, Barbara.

Born in Great Yarmouth, Macfadyen, 48, had a peripatetic childhood as his father worked in the oil industry moving across the UK and Asia. His mother was a trained actor and drama teacher, and parent and son enjoyed am-dram together.

His undoubted talent saw him accepted at Rada, aged just 17. He then joined Declan Donnellan's acclaimed Cheek by Jowl touring company at 21 where, among other roles, he starred in the Jacobean tragedy The Duchess of Malfi.

He has said he fully expected to continue a career in theatre, and had several roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company. After his TV career took off, he often returned to theatre, including playing Prince Hal in Henry IV for the National Theatre. But television, then Hollywood, beckoned, during his highly successful career, the limits of which now appear to be stratospheric.





▲ *Matthew Macfadyen, main picture, as the unctuous and obsequious Tom Wambsgans in Succession*
PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME HUNTER/ HBO/AP

▲ *The actor starred as Mr Darcy alongside Keira Knightley in Joe Wright's 2005 film version of Pride & Prejudice*
PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX BAILEY/ SHUTTERSTOCK

He first appeared on British screens in the television film Wuthering Heights, playing Hareton Earnshaw, before being snapped up for Spooks.

In 2005, he was cast as Mr Darcy, a brooding role at the time synonymous with Colin Firth. Starring opposite Keira Knightley, it was his first major Hollywood role, and brought with it worldwide fame. He was, naturally, nervous. "I wish I had enjoyed it more," he has previously said. "But I did feel pressure – maybe it was a self-imposed pressure of, you know: this is a big film, don't get it wrong."

For a while it seemed period drama would be his shtick. Ripper Street, where he played DI Edmund Reid in the long-running BBC mystery drama set in Whitechapel in the wake of the Jack the Ripper murders, ensured he was a household name.

He earned further plaudits for his portrayal of the "coughing major" on the 2020 ITV drama Quiz, in which he played Maj Charles Ingram, who was convicted of cheating his way to the top prize on Who Wants to be a Millionaire? James Graham, who wrote the script, has previously said he and the director, Stephen Frears, knew they would have to be very persuasive to land Macfadyen.

"Coming from the theatre, I'd known Matthew as one of our great stage actors, but vastly underappreciated," Graham has previously said. "But then, like everyone else, seeing him appear, or emerge, in Succession was a revelation. That is the most extraordinary performance, both buffoonish and terrifying simultaneously."

Succession has seen him play against type. Voraciously ambitious, obsequious and ruthless in equal measure, he played the husband of Shiv Roy with the tragi-comic qualities honed during his theatre days. He is mesmerisingly repulsive and pitiable.

"I don't know how he's managed to make such an obsequious and bullying character likable, but he has," Sarah Snook, who played Shiv, told the New York Times. "He's one of those actors who's got such love and empathy and compassion and curiosity for the world that he can really fashion a character into anything he wants."

'He is extraordinary in Succession ... both buffoonish and terrifying'

James Graham
Scriptwriter, Quiz

Bronze age teeth reveal oldest evidence of the plague in Britain

Ian Sample
Science editor

The oldest evidence for the plague in Britain has been discovered in 4,000-year-old human remains unearthed at bronze age burial sites in Cumbria and Somerset.

Traces of *Yersinia pestis* bacteria were found in the teeth of individuals at the Levens Park ring cairn monument near Kendal, and Charterhouse Warren Farm in the Mendips, where at least 40 men, women and children were buried, dismembered, in a natural shaft.

The findings show that a plague outbreak which swept Eurasia in the early bronze age spread across the sea to Britain, thousands of years before the country's first documented cases in the Plague of Justinian in AD541.

"This is the earliest plague found in Britain," said Pooja Swali, first author on the study in Nature Communications and a PhD student at the Francis Crick Institute in London.

Evidence for the outbreak emerged when Swali and her colleagues screened DNA lurking in the dental pulp of teeth from 34 skeletons at the two sites. Material from one woman, aged 35 to 45, at the Cumbrian site tested positive for plague bacteria, along with two children aged 10 to 12 at Charterhouse Warren Farm.

Radiocarbon dating at the sites found that all three lived at roughly the same time, about 4,000 years ago.

Swali was working in the lab one Friday night when the significance of the findings became clear. "I had my eureka moment, but there was no one to share it with," she said. "There was a moment of 'Wow, this is the earliest ever plague genome in Britain'."

All three individuals were infected with a form of *Yersinia pestis* that lacked the yapC and ymt genes of later strains. The ymt gene played a role in allowing plague to spread by fleas, leading to the bubonic form which triggered pandemics such as the Black Death, which killed half of the European population in the 14th century.

Prof Rick Schulting, an archaeologist at Oxford University and co-author of the study, said: "The finding of plague was completely unexpected, as this disease leaves no traces on the skeleton. At the moment we're not sure how this new evidence fits into the story of what happened at the [Charterhouse Warren Farm] site, and whether or not there may be some connection between the disease and the violence."

AD541
Previously the earliest date of documented cases in Britain, during the Plague of Justinian

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UNHCR teams in Aleppo, delivering lifesaving assistance in the wake of the Türkiye/Syria earthquakes, February 2023.



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UNHCR delivering emergency survival kits at the Chad/Sudan border to help people fleeing the current conflict, May 2023.

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Mental health calls Met police follow approach pioneered by Humberside

Helen Pidd
North of England editor

Where Hull leads, London follows. At least that's the case when it comes to a radical new approach to policing that has seen the Humberside constabulary achieve the highest arrest and crime detection rates in the country by refusing to attend most mental health calls.

When a letter from the Metropolitan police commissioner was leaked to the Guardian this week warning that his officers would no longer attend unnecessary mental health calls from September, Lee Freeman experienced a jolt of recognition.

The pioneering chief constable of Humberside police had issued a similarly blunt deadline to health partners back in 2019 when he decided far too much police time was being spent attending calls over concerns for welfare, mental health incidents or missing people.

Then, Freeman's force was receiving 25,000 such calls a year, 11% of total demand. His officers were deployed to 78% of those. Most were unnecessary and 75% came from other agencies, he said.

"We'd get someone saying, 'we're ringing from the hospital, we had a voluntary patient who was due to attend for an appointment because they've got depression and they've not turned up. Can you go check if they're OK, please?' And we would."

Other times, officers were called to detain someone having a mental health episode and take them to a place of safety but ended up spending "10, 12, sometimes 16 hours" waiting for a crisis bed to be found, said Freeman. "It was completely unsustainable."

He came up with what became Right Care, Right Person (RCRP), a strategy of deploying to only the most essential mental health-related calls. It has been so successful that it is being turned into a national partnership agreement to be adopted across England and Wales.



'I didn't have a duty of care under these circumstances, and I wasn't going to continue to assume it'

Lee Freeman
Humberside chief constable

Three years on, Humberside police attend an average of 508 fewer incidents a month, with 1,440 officer hours saved a month, according to Freeman. With those free hours, he formed teams dedicated to targeting drug dealers and finding missing people.

The results are stark: in the past two years Humberside police made more arrests per 1,000 people than any other force in the country, and had the highest detection rate for all crimes.

While Met police commissioner Sir Mark Rowley has given health providers in London less than four months to prepare, Freeman gave Humberside health leaders over a year. A deadline was necessary, he said, because his initial warnings - to local council chiefs, mental health providers, hospitals, ambulance trusts and clinical commissioning groups - were not met with sufficient urgency.

The response was "mixed", he said. The health chiefs all seemed to think there was "no immediate rush" to change the status quo. Like Rowley, he put pen to paper. "I did have to formally write and point out that from a legal perspective, actually, I didn't have a duty of care under these circumstances, and I wasn't going to continue to assume that duty of care."

That was in April 2019, and he set a series of deadlines, beginning in May 2020, after which his officers would be far more selective about attending four sorts of calls: concern for welfare, walkout of health care facilities, transport to mental health provision and dealing with people having mental health crises in public places.

His formal letters worked and before long the CCGs "found" (Freeman's word) about £1m in their budgets to fund additional mental health crisis suites and assessment beds. The ambulance trusts also "found" money to buy ambulances so paramedics would be the default transport providers for those in mental health crises.

Call handlers for 999 needed training to turn down requests for help, working alongside experts from Mind, the mental health charity. Freeman stressed that his officers did still turn up to 25% of mental health calls. The rest are diverted to health services in the call centre. "There are occasions when it's entirely appropriate for the police to go," said Freeman. "If somebody is being violent or is threatening anybody else or if somebody is committing a crime [or] if somebody has threatened ambulance staff, we go."



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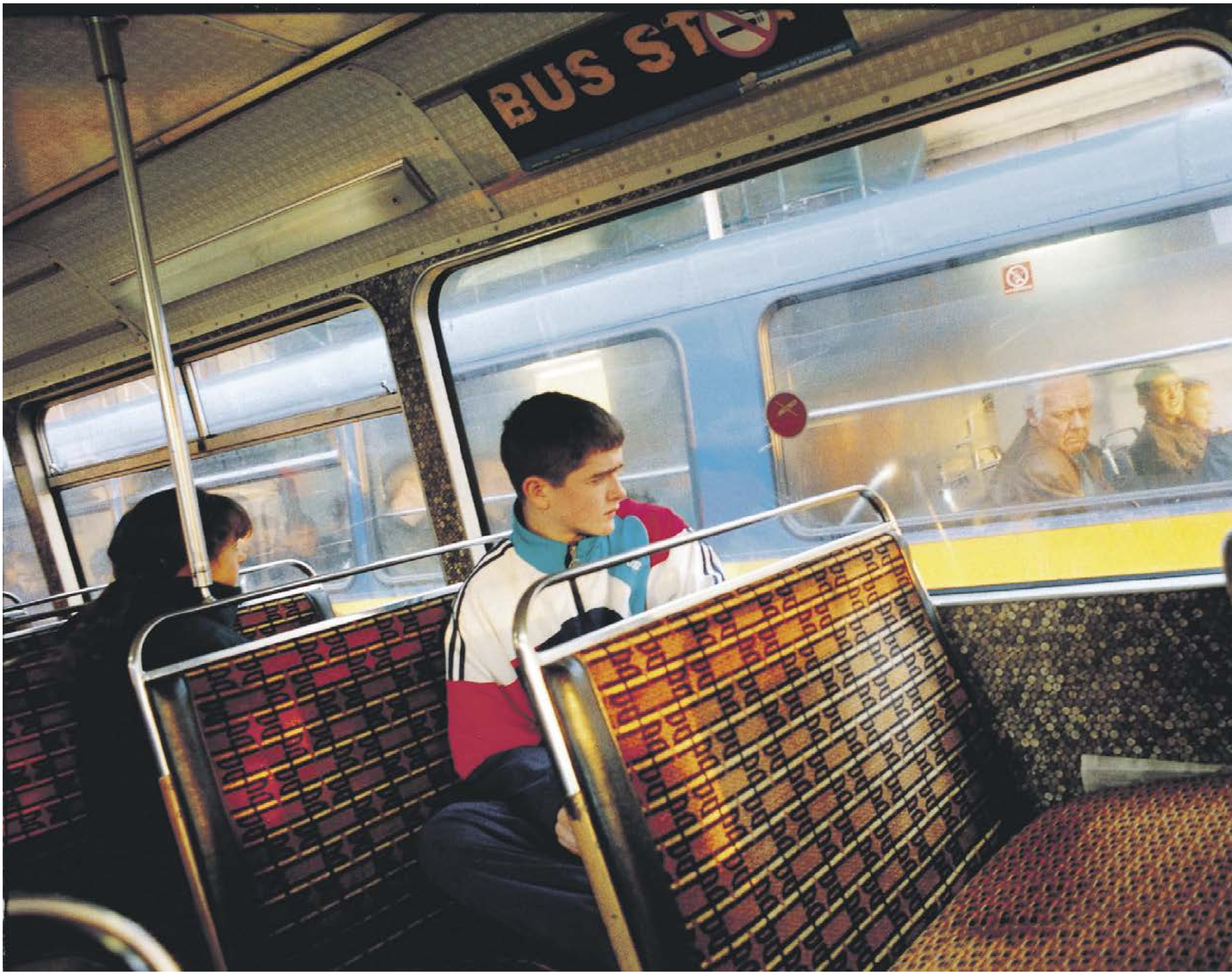
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Eyewitness

Photie Man: 50 Years of Tom Wood
The Irish photographer has captured everyday life for half a century, with 25 of those years in Liverpool, recording match days at Anfield to couples snogging on nights out on the Wirral during the social upheaval of the 80s and 90s. A retrospective at Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery celebrates his bond with the city and Merseyside



▶ **Lime St, 1995**
Travelling to work on the bus, Wood would take pictures of other passengers and the streets outside, for over 20 years



▼ **Not Miss New Brighton, 1978-79**
Wood arrived in 1978 to work at Liverpool School of Art (Liverpool John Moores University now)







ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: TOM WOOD ARCHIVE/ NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL

◀ **Finding a pair, 1990**
By the 1990s, the second-hand stalls at 'Greatie' market had mostly been replaced with traders selling bargain clothes



◀ **A camera! 1986**
Wood's work creates an intimate, multilayered portrait of the city and people

▶ **Gangolads, Anfield, 1992**
Every Saturday, he captured the crowds heading to Liverpool or Everton football grounds



▼ **Couple with new baby, Sefton Park, 1980**
'It has been a real labour of love,' says Wood



◀ **Pink lipstick (for Tracy and Vicky), 1984**
Wood's use of flash here emphasised the vivid colours of people's outfits, their flushed faces and warm bodies

▶ **Tired drink picture, 1986**
Wood's pictures from the Chelsea Reach nightclub in New Brighton are today among his most celebrated





World



◀ Polish military police on the streets of Zvecan, northern Kosovo, yesterday after clashes with Serb protesters demanding removal of ethnic Albanian mayors
PHOTOGRAPH: ARMEND NIMANI/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

'Fascist mobs' controlled by Serbia to blame for violence in Kosovo, PM says

Shaun Walker Bratislava
Lorenzo Tondo

Kosovo's prime minister yesterday blamed violence in the north of the country on "fascist mobs" controlled by the government of neighbouring Serbia, and said he had rejected a US request to relocate recently installed mayors out of their official offices.

More than 30 Nato peacekeeping soldiers were injured in clashes on Monday, prompting the alliance to announce it would send another 700 troops to the country.

Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, put the Serbian army on high combat alert.

The Nato peacekeeping mission, Kfor, said Italian and Hungarian peacekeepers were subjected to "unprovoked attacks and sustained trauma wounds with fractures and burns due to the explosion of incendiary devices".

"Yesterday was very severe, we were very lucky that no life was lost," the prime minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, told the Guardian by telephone from Pristina yesterday. He said "several" Nato peacekeepers were still in hospital.

The Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, on Monday called the attacks "unacceptable and irresponsible".

The violence came after ethnic Albanian mayors took office in Serb-majority areas of northern Kosovo, following elections in April that Serbs boycotted. Kurti blamed Belgrade for orchestrating the boycott, which led to an extremely low turnout.

The area's majority Serbs have never accepted Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia, and consider Belgrade their capital more than two decades after the Kosovo Albanian uprising against repressive Serbian rule.

Ethnic Albanians make up more than 90% of the population in Kosovo, but northern Serbs have long demanded the implementation of an EU-brokered 2013 deal for the creation of an association of autonomous municipalities in their area.



▶ Jens Stoltenberg at yesterday's press conference in Oslo, where he confirmed Nato would send 700 additional troops to Kosovo
PHOTOGRAPH: NTB/REUTERS

The violence has been widely condemned, but western allies of Kosovo have also sharply criticised the government in Pristina for the decision to install the mayors. On Friday, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, issued an unusually strong rebuke to a US ally, saying the decision to use force to access municipal buildings in the north had been taken "against the advice" of the US and European partners and had "sharply and unnecessarily escalated tensions".

Kurti expressed his displeasure at the statement, calling it "appeasement" of Vučić. "It's not just unfair and wrong and hurtful but at the same time very naive," he said. "Perhaps Secretary Blinken will explain this further one day."

Since then, Kurti said he had spoken to Gabriel Escobar, the US special envoy for the Balkans. He said Escobar had asked the Kosovan authorities to move the mayors to different premises, or to have them work from home, a request he had rejected.

In a sign of how much the recent events have damaged the relationship between Washington and Pristina, the US ambassador to Kosovo, Jeff Hovenier, told the Financial Times yesterday that the US will cancel joint military drills and put diplomatic meetings on hold.

Kurti insisted that the new mayors were "necessary for smooth functioning of municipalities". He said: "I acknowledge that the political legitimacy of these mayors is low. However, the legitimacy of others is zero."

Kosovo has been backed strongly by the west, but non-recognition by Russia, China and even five of the 27 EU nations has meant it has not been able to take up a seat at the UN.

Yesterday, the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, told a press conference in Oslo that the alliance would send 700 additional troops to Kosovo and put an additional battalion of reserve forces on "high alert".

'Spy whale'
Sighting off Sweden renews speculation
Page 27



Press freedom
Female journalists on crackdown in Iran
Page 28

Spain's conservatives riding high as centre-right Citizens bows out of July snap general election

Sam Jones
Madrid

Spain's centre-right Citizens party, once seen as a potential kingmaker, has announced it will not run in July's snap general election after an abysmal performance in Sunday's regional and municipal elections, ceding its space to the triumphant conservative People's party (PP).

Citizens attracted just 1.35% of the vote on Sunday and lost its seats in 12 regional parliaments, providing unequivocal proof that the party was in its death throes. Its decline began in 2018, when it refused to back the Socialists' successful vote of no confidence against the corruption-mired PP government of Mariano Rajoy, and was exacerbated by its decision to abandon the centre ground and shift to the right.

"The message from Sunday's regional and municipal elections has been very clear," the party's general secretary, Adrián Vázquez Lázara, told a press conference yesterday. "We have concluded that, as things stand today, the Spanish people do not see us as a transformative political alternative for our country."

"That's not good news for us, and it's not good news for the thousands of liberals in Spain and in Europe," he said. For that reason, he added, the national committee had decided the party would not run in the next general election and would instead prepare itself "for the new political scenario".

The absence of Citizens will serve to further strengthen the PP, which gobbled up the party's votes on Sunday as it won an emphatic victory that prompted Spain's Socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, to call a snap general election five months ahead of schedule.

The PP far exceeded expectations, securing an absolute majority in the Madrid region and taking six other regions that had been run by the Socialists. Sánchez's junior coalition partner on the far left, the anti-austerity Podemos party - which, like Citizens, once offered an alternative to the political duopoly of the Socialists and the PP - suffered huge losses in the elections. Podemos is currently negotiating with the new Sumar alliance in an effort to bring together the fractured Spanish left.

Earlier yesterday, the PP's leader, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, had welcomed preliminary reports of Citizens' decision not to run on 23 July.

"In my opinion, it would be a mature and responsible thing to do - and, in the name of the Spain that is hoping for a change, I'd like to recognise that," he said. "They have recognised Sunday's message, which was that we can't let even a few votes go to waste and not translate them into seats."



▲ *Alberto Núñez Feijóo celebrates sweeping gains made by his People's party in Spain's regional and municipal elections* PHOTOGRAPH: JAVIER SORIANO/AFP/GETTY

> ***'As things stand, the Spanish people do not see us as a transformative political alternative for our country'***
>
> **Adrián Vázquez Lázara**
> *Citizens party*

Feijóo's party succeeded in turning the regional and municipal elections into a referendum on Sánchez's style of government, which it calls *sanchismo* and depicts as cynical, weak, overly dependent on Basque and Catalan nationalists, and fixated on remaining in office.

Its campaign was helped by Podemos's bungled sexual offences reforms - which have allowed more than 1,000 convicted sex offenders to have their sentences cut, and more than 100 to win early release - and by the spectre of the defunct Basque terror group Eta.

The PP quickly, noisily and successfully attacked the decision of the pro-independence Basque party EH Bildu - on whom Sánchez's minority government relies for support in congress - to field 44 convicted Eta members, including seven people found guilty of violent crimes, as candidates.

However, despite Feijóo's buoyant tone and his glee at the prospect of ending *sanchismo* five months earlier than planned, the PP will still need to rely on the support of the far-right Vox party to form new regional governments in many of the areas where it triumphed on Sunday.

Although the PP already runs the Castilla y León region in coalition with Vox, it knows that its claims to represent the political centre could be undermined by more deals with the far right. It will instead be hoping to secure Vox's abstention in regional investiture votes. But the party's refusal to explicitly rule out any deals with Vox could come at a price.

Sánchez, a politician with a long history of high-stakes gambles, is hoping that his decision to call the snap election will unite and galvanise the Spanish left in the face of any possible union between the conservatives and the far right.

Among those congratulating Vox on its strong showing on Sunday were Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, whose party has neo-fascist roots, and Hungary's far-right prime minister, Viktor Orbán.

US supreme court could transform public life with end-of-term decisions

Ed Pilkington
New York

The US supreme court is gearing itself up for the final nail-biting month of its 2022-3 term in which it will deliver decisions that could transform critical areas of public life, from affirmative action in colleges to voting rights, LGBTQ+ equality and the future of Native American tribes.

As the court enters the traditional June climax to its judicial year, it is being battered by ethics scandals and plummeting public confidence.

Yet the six rightwing justices who command a supermajority on the nine-seat bench are still expected to push at the limits of constitutional law in the pursuit of their ideological goals. For the first time since the pandemic in 2020 the justices will appear in person to read out the opinions - as well as potentially blistering dissents from the three liberal members.

This time last year, the devastating leak of the draft ruling in Dobbs v Jackson was followed in June by the ruling itself which abolished the right to abortion. The dust from that eruption has barely settled as the country braces once again for a month of seismic judicial interventions.

"I'm surprised that the supreme court is doing so much so quickly - in the past there have been institutionalists at the court who have put the brakes on," said Tara Grove, a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin.



▲ *The supreme court will rule on gay couples' right to equal treatment*

Top of the pile of decisions being awaited are challenges to the race-conscious admissions policies of Harvard and the University of North Carolina. Should the court strike down affirmative action it would overturn 50 years of established practice.

The pair of challenges were brought by the conservative Students for Fair Admissions to restore "colour-blind principles" in how students are chosen.

Past affirmative action challenges focused on state universities and colleges, but this time private ones are also under the spotlight.

The court is already struggling to hold on to public trust after ethics scandals over Clarence Thomas's acceptance of luxury holidays from a billionaire real estate developer and Neil Gorsuch's sale of a property to the head of a law firm that has business before the court.

But a taste of what may be to come was given last week when, for the second time in a year, the rightwing justices delivered a blow to the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to combat pollution, prompting the liberal justice Elena Kagan to remark caustically that the majority had appointed itself "the national decision maker on environmental policy".

In Allen v Milligan, the court appears poised to destroy one of the last critical vestiges of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, a crown jewel of the civil rights movement. The case emerges from Alabama, the southern state where electoral maps are drawn in such a way that Black political representation is stymied and where no Black candidate has ever been sent to Congress from a majority-white district. Should the court side with Alabama, it would in effect be sweeping away protections against racial discrimination in elections and legalising racial gerrymandering.

Other bone-jarring decisions could come in cases dealing with the right to equal treatment for same-sex couples and how children are handled in Native American families. The court will rule on whether the Colorado graphic design firm 303 Creative can withhold services on religious grounds from gay couples wanting to post wedding websites.

Brackeen v Haaland reviews whether Native American children can be forcibly removed from their families by child welfare agencies and placed in non-Native homes. That practice has a long, dark history in the US of being used to sap the strength of tribes.

Uganda anti-gay law
US may restrict visas

The US may restrict visas issued to Ugandan officials in its latest condemnation of the African country's enactment of stringent - and highly controversial - anti-LGBTQ+ laws.

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, said that Joe Biden's White House was "deeply troubled" by the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which was signed into law by Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's president, on Monday, prompting widespread criticism.

Blinken said he was looking to "promote accountability" for Ugandan officials who have violated the rights of LGBTQ+ people, with possible measures including the curtailment of visas.

"I have also directed the department to update our travel guidance to American citizens and to US businesses as well as to consider deploying existing visa restrictions tools against Ugandan officials and other individuals for abuse of universal human rights, including the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons," Blinken said in a statement. Oliver Milman



▲ Roberts-Smith is suing three Australian newspapers over claims he committed war crimes in Afghanistan



▼ The defamation trial has laid bare military details of Australia's decades-long war in Afghanistan
PHOTOGRAPH: CORPORAL RAYMOND VANCE

'War crimes' defamation trial to decide accused SAS soldier's fate

Ben Doherty
Sydney

Ben Roberts-Smith, recipient of Australia's highest military honour, the Victoria Cross, will learn if he has won his defamation case against three Australian newspapers tomorrow.

Australia's most decorated living soldier stands accused of murdering unarmed civilians in war, of a cowardly act of domestic violence, of bullying and of violence and intimidation.

The judgment, to be delivered by Justice Besanko in Sydney, will be the culmination of a near five-year legal process, and one of the most consequential and expensive trials in Australian legal and military history.

Roberts-Smith, a former SAS corporal, has been accused by three Australian newspapers of war crimes: of murdering six civilians while on deployment in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2012, including kicking a handcuffed prisoner off a cliff before ordering him shot dead.

He has also been accused of machine-gunning an unarmed disabled man to death, of ordering subordinates to execute prisoners, of repeatedly bullying and assaulting comrades, and of committing an act of domestic violence against a woman he was having an affair with.

Roberts-Smith denies the allegations and all wrongdoing. He has sued the Age, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Canberra Times alleging their reporting defamed him, wrongly portraying him as a war criminal and murderer who "broke the moral and legal rules of military engagement". The newspapers are defending their reporting as true.

Roberts-Smith's lawyers told the court his accusers are fabulists and fantasists, failed soldiers embittered by their own "cowardice", and a "corrosive jealousy" towards his successes. Giving evidence as the first witness before the federal court, Roberts-Smith said the Victoria Cross he won for spectacular bravery in 2010 was not an honour he sought, but, ultimately, a burden "thrust upon him". "It put a target on my back," he told the court.

The decision in this case could cost the losing side up to AU$35m (£18.5m) in costs alone. If Roberts-Smith wins, he will also probably be entitled to millions in damages.

Roberts-Smith has taken out a loan from his employer, Australian media baron Kerry Stokes, to run this defamation action. He has offered his Victoria Cross as collateral if he loses the case.

But the judgment might not be a straightforward decision one way or the other. The judge could find the newspapers were successful in proving some of the allegations true – to the civil standard of "balance of probabilities" – but not others. In that circumstance, the judgment is likely to be a balancing act of the damage to Roberts-Smith's reputation of the unproven allegations, against those allegations that were proven. The stakes are critical on all sides.

Should the judge find the allegations against Roberts-Smith proven, his barrister, Arthur Moses, told the court it "would paint Mr Roberts-Smith as a murderer … a violent person and a domestic violence abuser. It would indelibly and permanently tarnish his standing and good name".

Should Roberts-Smith win, his vindication will, in many eyes, restore his former standing as a decorated veteran venerated for his gallantry in battle. His reputation has suffered a vertiginous collapse since the publication of the allegations.

But the brutal, and at times bitter, defamation trial has also damaged his military and public standing.

Former comrades told the court they saw him murder unarmed civilians in breach of the laws of war, and testify that Roberts-Smith was a bully and violent towards those he served with.

A former lover told the court he punched and then threatened her. She testified that he told her: "If you turn on me I will burn your house down." Roberts-Smith denies the allegations.

The court heard Roberts-Smith withheld potentially damaging evidence, including classified military files, by burying USB sticks in a child's lunchbox in his back yard. The files were later handed to police investigators. Roberts-Smith denies ever burying them.

For the newspapers, beyond the calamitous financial impact, a loss could be expected to seriously dent their appetite – and the Australian media's more generally – for critical public interest investigations.

If the newspapers win, it will cement the reputations of the journalists who wrote the stories. The trial revealed painstaking work, over years, seeking to verify what were tightly held rumours within the arcane, closed world of Australia's SAS regiment.

Over more than 100 days of evidence, the trial heard extraordinary testimony from dozens of former and serving SAS soldiers and officers, including several who continue to serve in the regiment, some at senior operational levels.



▶ Roberts-Smith met Queen Elizabeth II in Buckingham Palace when he was awarded the Victoria Cross for Australia in 2011
PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY DEVLIN/PA

Dramatically, three SAS soldiers – each accused of murder on separate missions – refused in court to answer questions about what they did in Afghanistan, objecting on the grounds that any truthful answer they gave would be self-incriminatory. Each was permitted by Justice Besanko not to answer.

Regardless of the result of this monumental defamation trial, sources close to the trial say an appeal is likely.

But the trial has had broader impact still: military details of Australia's unsuccessful 20-year campaign in Afghanistan have been laid bare in open court; ministers of the crown have been subpoenaed to give evidence; media empires have been pitched in scarcely concealed conflict; and institutions such as the Australian War Memorial, which still hosts a display dedicated to Roberts-Smith, have been drawn in.

And there remains a broader, criminal context. Already, one member of the Australian SAS has been charged with the war crime of murder arising from his alleged conduct in Afghanistan. Former trooper Oliver Schulz's case is before the courts in New South Wales. He could face life imprisonment if convicted.

The Australian government's Office of the Special Investigator is still examining "between 40 and 50" allegations of war crimes committed by Australian special forces troops in Afghanistan.

Separately, Roberts-Smith has been told by the Australian Federal Police he is a suspect in their investigations into alleged war crimes committed in Afghanistan, according to a recent court judgment in other proceedings, which also noted no charges have been brought against Roberts-Smith.

Regardless of the result in the defamation action, there remains the possibility that Roberts-Smith is ultimately criminally charged with – and forced to defend at trial – allegations of war crimes.

Japan's PM fires his policy-secretary son after 'inappropriate' party photos surface

Justin McCurry
Tokyo

The eldest son of Fumio Kishida, the Japanese prime minister, is to step down as his executive policy secretary amid public outcry over his use of the leader's official residence for a private party.

Photos published by the Shukan Bunshun weekly magazine showed his son Shotaro and about 10 relatives posing or lying on the symbolically important red-carpeted stairs of the residence in an imitation of group photos of newly appointed cabinets. Shotaro is at the centre – the position reserved for the prime minister.

Other photos taken at the *bonenkai* "forget-the-year" party on 30 December last year showed guests standing at a podium as if holding a news conference.

Shotaro Kishida's resignation is a blow to his father, whose approval ratings improved immediately after this month's G7 summit in Hiroshima and an apparent attempt on his life during a campaign stop last month.

"As secretary for [the prime minister's] political affairs, a public position, his actions were inappropriate and I decided to replace him to have him take responsibility," Kishida said on Monday. "Of course, responsibility for the appointment lies with me." He said his son would be replaced by a longtime personal aide, Takayoshi Yamamoto, tomorrow.

Kishida acknowledged that he had briefly greeted the guests but said he had not stayed for the dinner party.

The chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu Matsuno, promised to ensure the residence was not used improperly again.

It is not the first time Shotaro, 32, has been criticised for abusing his official position. In January, while accompanying his father, he was reprimanded for using embassy cars for private sightseeing trips in Britain and Paris, and for shopping for souvenirs for cabinet members at a luxury department store in London.



▲ *Japan's prime minister, Fumio Kishida with his eldest son, Shotaro*

Kishida said he had severely reprimanded his son over the party, but that failed to quell criticism from the public and opposition MPs, who accused him of nepotism.

Shotaro began working for his father in March 2020 after leaving his job at a trading house, with Kishida insisting he had appointed his son for his "personality and insight".

The scandal could dampen speculation that Kishida is planning to call a snap lower house election after generally positive reviews of his performance during the G7 meeting.

In a three-day opinion poll by the Nikkei business newspaper from 26 May – several days after the summit ended – support for Kishida's government dropped to 47% compared with 52% in April.

Kishida appointed his son as policy secretary – one of eight secretary posts – in October. Appointing family members as a step towards grooming them as heirs is common in Japanese politics, which has a high proportion of hereditary lawmakers.

Additional reporting
Associated Press

Blessed baby
Pilgrims lift a child up to the effigy of the Virgin of El Rocio on Monday as part of the Andalucían village's yearly pilgrimage, which draws hundreds of thousands in traditional dress, bringing a burst of colour as they traverse the countryside.

PHOTOGRAPH: CRISTINA QUICLER/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES



New speculation over 'spy whale' after beluga turns up off Sweden

Agence France-Presse
Stockholm

A beluga whale that turned up in Norway wearing a harness in 2019, prompting speculation it was a spy trained by the Russian navy, has reappeared off Sweden's coast.



First discovered in Norway's far north, the whale, pictured, spent more than three years slowly moving down the Norwegian coastline, before speeding up in recent months to move on to Sweden.

On Sunday, it was observed in Hunnebostrand, off Sweden's southwest coast. "We don't know why he has sped up so fast right now," said Sebastian Strand, a marine biologist with the OneWhale organisation.

"It could be hormones driving him to find a mate. Or it could be loneliness, as belugas are a very social species – it could be that he's searching for other beluga whales."

When the whale first appeared in the Norwegian Arctic in April 2019, marine biologists from the Norwegian directorate of fisheries removed a human-made harness from him.

The harness had a mount suited for an action camera and the words Equipment St Petersburg printed on the plastic clasps. Directorate officials said it may have escaped an enclosure, and may have been trained by the Russian navy, as it appeared to be accustomed to humans.

Moscow officials never reacted to Norwegian speculation the whale could be a Russian spy.

In brief

Nepal

Climate crisis blamed for deaths on Everest

Experts say this could be one of the deadliest years on record on Mount Everest, with variable weather caused by the climate crisis being blamed as one of the main reasons for the deaths of up to 17 people.

Twelve people have been confirmed dead this season and another five are missing, presumed dead, according to the Himalayan Database. This is matched only by the events of 2014, when 17 died, most of whom were Sherpas killed in an avalanche.

Yuba Raj Khatiwada, the director of Nepal's tourism department, said: "Climate change is having a big impact." Hannah Ellis-Petersen

Australia

Man prises crocodile's jaws off his head

An Australian man who survived a crocodile attack by prising the reptile's jaws off his head says he was "simply in the wrong place, at the wrong time". Marcus McGowan, 51, was snorkelling off the Cape York peninsula in northern Queensland.

"I realised it was a crocodile. I was able to lever its jaws open just far enough to get my head out," McGowan said.

"The crocodile then attempted to attack me a second time, but I managed to push it away with my right hand, which was then bitten." He was treated for scalp lacerations and puncture wounds on his head and hand. Rafqa Touma

Italy

Mystery of bright green Grand Canal solved

The transformation of a stretch of Venice's Grand Canal to fluorescent green was due to fluorescein, a non-toxic substance used for testing wastewater networks, local authorities have concluded.

The section of canal turned green on Sunday, prompting police to investigate amid speculation it could be a stunt by climate activists. But analysis of samples showed the presence of fluorescein and "have not shown the presence of toxic elements", said Arpav, the region's environment agency. It did not specify the origin of the substance. AFP *Rome*



Iran

Female journalists speak out on brutal crackdown

Deepa Parent

It was a chilling warning from government agents. A young female journalist based in Tehran recounted the calls and messages she had received: "It said they were at my sister's place and were there to rape her."

These were the same agents from Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) who had interrogated her after she attended one of the nationwide protests that erupted last year after the death in custody of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Jina Amini, who was arrested for wearing her headscarf improperly and then reportedly beaten into a coma.

Before the trials this week of two female journalists, who were among the first to report on the death of Amini, reporters in Iran described the violent beatings, threats and imprisonment they had faced for reporting on protests.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, one female journalist said she feared for her life despite being released uncharged after being detained by the IRGC for three days. She had been arrested while covering protests as a reporter after Amini's death. "They [IRGC agents] have messaged me several times with death threats that they will kill me, like the protesters they killed during the protests," she said.

Another said she had been told that she had "no right to cover the protests" and could not interview families of anyone killed.

▼ *Soldiers from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has targeted journalists*
PHOTOGRAPH: WANA NEWS AGENCY/REUTERS





▲ *The journalists Niloofar Hamedi (left) and Elaheh Mohammadi are on trial behind closed doors accused of orchestrating nationwide protests*

About 40% of journalists detained in the past seven months have been female, according to the press freedom organisation Reporters Without Borders.

The two women, whose trials began behind closed doors this week, are accused of conspiring with hostile foreign powers, a charge that potentially carries the death penalty. They had been imprisoned in solitary confinement since being arrested after their reports appeared in September 2022. Niloofar Hamedi, who works for the reformist newspaper Shargh Daily, and Elaheh Mohammadi, who writes on gender equality and social issues for the Hammihan newspaper, were accused of "orchestrating the nationwide protests" through their reporting and of working with western intelligence, especially the CIA.

Hamedi's husband, Mohammad hossein Ajorlou, tweeted that yesterday's trial session "ended in less than two hours while her lawyers did not get a chance to defend her and her family members were not allowed to attend the court". Journalists in Iran say much of the brutality has been focused on citizen journalists, both male and female. They had "filled the void of official journalists who are trapped by censorship", a female journalist said. "Out of fear of international reaction, the Iranian government harasses well-known journalists less, but punishes anonymous citizen journalists. I know many who were beaten in custody, and their legs were broken. All the videos and pictures published during the protests were from these citizen journalists."

The dwindling number of jobs for independent journalists - as well as threats to their lives - has forced some who spoke to the Guardian to join state-run media outlets to be able to make a living. They still hope for the chance to report freely again. "The people of Iran are more aware and wiser than ever but … how will Iranians fight against this authoritarian regime?" the journalist said. "Sometimes I think of leaving Iran, but who will then help voices to be heard?"

Italian agents and ex-Israeli soldier among four victims of lake disaster

Lorenzo Tondo
Palermo

Two agents from the Italian intelligence services and a retired member of the Israeli security forces were among the victims on Sunday when a tourist boat capsized and sank in a sudden, violent storm in a northern Italian lake, it has emerged.

Claudio Alonzi, 62, and Tiziana Barnobi, 53, were both working for Italian intelligence and were officially named on Monday by the country's officials.

The body of a former member of the Israeli security forces was also recovered by Italian firefighters and his identity was confirmed by Israel's Foreign Ministry, according to Italian state broadcaster, Rai.

The fourth body belonged to a Russian woman, Anya Bozhkova, wife of the ship's owner.

The boat was reportedly carrying more than 20 people, including a group of foreign tourists celebrating a birthday, plus two crew members, when a whirlwind overturned the vessel on Sunday.

It is not yet clear whether the three agents were on holiday on the lake or if they had met for work reasons.

Firefighters said 19 passengers had been saved. Many reportedly managed to swim to shore, or were picked up by other boats after the boat overturned off Lisanza, at the southern end of Lake Maggiore.

The victims include a Russian citizen, an Israeli and two Italians.

The Lombardy region's president, Attilio Fontana, said the incident had been caused by a whirlwind. The boat was 16 metres (52ft) long and had been hired by tourists, he said on Facebook.

The Busto Arsizio prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into the incident.

A firefighters' video published by the Corriere della Sera showed the helicopter flying over choppy waters, where chairs and other debris could be seen floating.

The whirlwind was part of a storm system that hit the Lombardy region on Sunday evening, forcing delays at the Malpensa airport.

On Monday, Italian authorities said checks were under way into the boat's safety and capacity.



▲ *Four died after the tourist boat carrying at least 20 people capsized*

Saudi women's rights activist in prison over social media posts

Stephanie Kirchgaessner
Washington

A women's rights activist in Saudi Arabia has been imprisoned for having Twitter and Snapchat accounts that embraced recent social reforms but demanded more fundamental rights in the kingdom, it has emerged.

Manahel al-Otaibi, a 29-year-old fitness instructor and artist, was arrested in November. She was accused by Saudi authorities of using a hashtag - translated to #societyisready - to call for an end to male guardianship rules.

Otaibi has not yet been convicted and remains in detention. But similar cases suggest that public demands for women's rights - including inheritance rights and the ability to end a marriage with an abusive husband - have been deemed seditious.

The case marks the latest example of Saudis being targeted for using social media accounts to promote reform or challenge the authorities.

The kingdom has sought to project an image of a country that has liberalised strict rules governing women, including their dress and ability to work outside the home. But the government has continued to crack down on those who call for more basic reforms.

Lina al-Hathloul, a Saudi activist who lives outside the kingdom, called Otaibi's case "yet another example of Saudi Arabia's empty promises when it comes to reforms. Saudi women still get imprisoned and face sham trials for demanding their rights, or for merely believing that they are now free to wear what they want."

Court documents show that in addition to her use of social media Otaibi has been accused of not wearing "decent" clothes.

The government of the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has frequently targeted Twitter users as part of a campaign of domestic and international repression.

Saudi's Prince Alwaleed bin Talal controls the largest investment in Twitter after Elon Musk, as well as a $250m (£200m) stake in Snapchat, according to press accounts.

Snapchat did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Twitter's press office sent a poo emoji - its automatic response to press inquiries since Musk's takeover.

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
-105.13	-47.79	-120.68	+94.62	1.1568	1.2410
7522.07	4104.75	32972.66	31328.16	+0.0033	+0.0057

Business

Asda to buy petrol stations in challenge to Sainsbury's

Sarah Butler
Joanna Partridge

Asda is poised to acquire 350 petrol forecourts and 1,000 takeaways in the UK and Ireland from its sister business EG Group, in a deal worth £2.27bn, helping the retailer in its aim of overtaking Sainsbury's to become Britain's second biggest grocer.

The supermarket group's chair, Stuart Rose, said the acquisition would create a "powerful consumer champion" that was committed to being a "price leader" on fuel and the lowest price of the UK's big four supermarkets on groceries.

However, the deal is funded by an additional £770m of new loans and £450m in new funds from the billionaire Issa brothers and the private-equity firm TDR Capital, which bought Asda in 2020 and also owns EG. A further £1.1bn will be raised through the sale and lease-back of Asda supermarkets, heaping new financial liabilities on the business which has already struggled to keep pace with some of its bigger rivals in the battle against inflation.

Clive Black, an analyst at Shore Capital, said the level of debt was "very high compared with key market competitors" and that would leave it "hamstrung by leverage" making it harder to be competitive on price at a time when rising interest rates were making debts more costly to service and competition was increasing from the discounters Aldi and Lidl.

Nadine Houghton, the national officer for Asda workers at the GMB union, said she had written to Lord Rose asking: "There is a huge question over who will pay the price for this debt leveraging. Are you able to guarantee that working people are not going to face lower pay from Asda, or higher costs at the pump?"

The long-awaited tie-up of the two groups is expected to create a combined business worth about £10bn and will allow the supermarket to expand further into convenience retail and install more cafes and takeaways.

The combined group is expected to serve about 21 million customers every week and will have revenues of nearly £30bn. Both businesses are chaired by Rose, the former boss of Marks & Spencer.

He said the business would have a "fully sustainable capital structure" and that adding profits from EG's UK forecourts would help service its extra debts.

"We are ambitious for the business and we want to be as big as we can be," he said, claiming that Asda had gained market share as a result of improvements under its new owners.



▲ *Bosses say Asda is committed to being a 'price leader' on fuel*

Asda is currently the UK's third biggest supermarket with a 13.9% share of the grocery market, according to the research firm Kantar, compared with Sainsbury's, which has 14.8%.

After it buys EG, the combined group will operate about 640 supermarkets, 700 petrol forecourts and 1,000 takeaways, including large franchises for KFC and Subway. All of the EG sites acquired will be rebranded as Asda - 166 EG locations had already been renamed Asda on the Move.

Mohsin Issa, the boss and co-owner of Asda, said the deal would enable the retailer to step up the pace of expansion into convenience retail.

£2.27bn
The value of Asda's deal with EG Group to acquire 350 petrol forecourts and 1,000 takeaways

He said the combined group could grab more market share as converting EG's existing forecourt convenience stores to Asda had led to sales almost doubling at sites where it had already been tried.

EG employees at the sites being sold will switch to Asda, a strategy that has been criticised by the GMB union, which represents thousands of Asda staff and which called it a deal that was "bad for workers".

The deal is not expected to be heavily scrutinised by the competition watchdog, the Competition and Markets Authority, as it already considers the two businesses to be one because of their shared ownership.

Before the deal, Mohsin and Zuber Issa were co-chief executives of EG Group, the business they founded in 2001 and which has more than 6,000 sites worldwide. Asda said it would begin a search to appoint a new group chief executive.

The supermarket said it would invest more than £150m over the next three years to integrate the combined businesses. Walmart, the US retail giant, retains a minority stake in Asda but did not contribute additional funds to buy EG.

Channel 4's boss in line for record £1.4m in annual pay

Mark Sweney



▲ *Alex Mahon is likely to become Channel 4's best-paid executive since it was founded 40 years ago*
PHOTOGRAPH: YUI MOK/PA

Alex Mahon could receive the highest annual income for a chief executive in Channel 4's history after the broadcaster avoided being privatised this year.

The station's bosses are set to take home millions, while the cost of living crisis weighs heavily on many of its lower-paid staff.

Mahon, who was awarded the maximum bonus payout possible by the corporation's remuneration committee for 2021, could receive almost £1.4m in total remuneration for 2022 if she is deemed to have once again hit the top performance targets.

Channel 4's almost 1,000 staff also benefit from the performance of the company, though the broadcaster's annual report shows the pay gap between top management and staff is widening quickly.

Mahon was paid about £1.2m in 2021, compared with £991,000 in 2020. In 2020, her pay was 23 times that of an employee in the lower end of the broadcaster's pay structure.

This gap rose to 30.3 times in 2021. Her estimated remuneration for last year would beat the record paid to a Channel 4 chief executive, held by Andy Duncan who received £1.21m in 2007 in a pay packet boosted by a special bonus payout linked to his move from the BBC.

£153,000
The amount of an additional retention bonus that Alex Mahon is set to receive this summer

The most Mahon's predecessor David Abraham received in any of his seven years in charge, from 2010-17, was just under £1m.

During her almost six-year tenure, Mahon has navigated Channel 4 through the pandemic and headed off the latest attempt by the government to privatise the state-owned broadcaster.

In 2021, Channel 4 made a record £1.2bn in revenues. The broadcaster's board rewarded Mahon by upping the maximum annual bonus payout from 50% to 80% of base salary while bonus terms for staff and other management were unchanged.

Channel 4's financial performance for last year is understood to have fallen short of 2021's record levels. However, even if Mahon is awarded a bonus of just over 50% of her base salary, she is likely to become Channel 4's best-paid executive since it was founded 40 years ago.

This is in part because of a decision taken by Channel 4's board during the government's privatisation drive to award a separate "retention bonus" to acknowledge the commitment of staff during the "extraordinary and difficult period".

The additional bonus, which will be paid out if staff stay in post until June, is understood to be 25% of base salary for top executives, then tiered at 20% for other management and 15% for regular staff.

Having seen off privatisation, weathered the pandemic and navigated the shift of much of Channel 4's operations out of London, there is speculation as to whether the time is right for Mahon to seek a new opportunity - after banking her £153,000 retention bonus this summer.

In total, Channel 4's top and highest-paid management, which includes the chief operating officer, Jonathan Allan, and the chief content officer, Ian Katz, are likely to take home about £3m between them in pay and bonuses for last year.

Channel 4's staff received a 5% pay rise last year, less than half the rate of inflation. However, staff bonus awards range from a maximum of 10% of gross salary for a typical staff member to 20% for a head of department; and from 30% to 50% for Katz and Allan to Mahon's range of between 30% and 80%.

Channel 4 pays out on the order of £5m annually in bonuses in total to regular staff, though they will also receive the additional "retention bonus" in the awards for 2022.

Mahon's pay will be made public when the corporation publishes its annual report in June or July.

Channel 4 declined to comment.

Business view
Larry Elliott



Pressuring food retailers to cut prices lets ministers look tough without really doing anything

A cost of living crisis. Pressure on the government to step in to help hard-pressed consumers. Calls for supermarkets to cut prices on staple food items. Substitute Rishi Sunak for Ted Heath, step into a time capsule and journey back to Britain in 1972.

Let's be clear, ministers are not considering imposing the sort of statutory price controls on a loaf of bread, a pint of milk or a bar of soap that were put in place half a century ago. Not now and not ever, according to Whitehall sources. But it has emerged that Sunak and his team are certainly not averse to the big supermarkets coming up with their own voluntary agreement to reduce the cost of the weekly shop.

This is an indication of just how concerned ministers are about the stickiness of inflation - and food price rises in particular. Official figures out last week showed the cost of living as measured by the consumer prices index fell last month by much less than expected, with the cost of food almost 20% higher than a year earlier.

The backdrop to reports this weekend about voluntary price curbs is the fact the prime minister made five pledges to voters in early January, one of which was to halve the annual inflation rate by the end of the year. At the time, it looked like the easiest of goals, but almost halfway through the year it now looks more of a stretch. Hence, the "brainstorming session" between government special advisers and the big retailers to come up with something - anything - that might help hasten the process.

France appears to have been the inspiration for the idea of industry-led price curbs. Emmanuel Macron's government struck a deal in March under which food retailers agreed to set the "lowest possible price" on a number of everyday items for three months.

The drawbacks of price controls are obvious. The proposed voluntary structure means supermarkets can choose whether to take part (and not all of them have). There is nothing to stop food retailers from raising the prices on non-staple items.

Controls distort the price mechanism, boosting demand and causing supply shortages. They also benefit rich households as much as poor ones. Increasing welfare payments to the most vulnerable is a more cost-effective way of offering financial support.

All that said, many of those objections also applied to the capping of energy bills after the surge in global gas prices last year, and that didn't stop governments - including the UK's - from stepping in to prevent a catastrophic hit to living standards. Price controls were considered the least-bad option in that case. What's more, they can be effective as a short-term policy tool. Provided the reason for the price surge is temporary, price controls can give governments a breathing space.



▲ *Official figures showed food costs were almost 20% higher last month than they were a year earlier*

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, supporters of price controls said they were needed to prevent a small number of firms exploiting their market power to gouge consumers. Although the term had not then been coined, it was an early sighting of greedflation, which is when companies boost profits by raising prices by more than their costs have increased.

> *Increasing welfare payments to the most vulnerable is a more cost-effective way of offering financial support*

Although Britain's food retailing is dominated by a handful of supermarket chains, the big grocers insist their modest profit margins show they do not operate as a price-fixing cartel. On the contrary, they say stiff competition means consumers are getting a good deal in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

The price of food on the world's commodity markets was 20% lower in April than a year earlier, but it is taking time for consumers to feel the benefit. According to the British Retail Consortium's latest bulletin, annual food price inflation eased in May, but only from 15.7% to 15.4%.

So what is the government up to? By seeming to lean on food retailers, ministers can look tough while not actually doing anything. Then if, as expected, food price inflation starts to fall, they can claim the credit. If on the other hand food price inflation remains stubbornly high, they can blame the supermarkets.

The Scott Trust Limited, sole shareholder of Guardian Media Group plc is seeking two new trustees

The Trust's core purpose is securing and preserving the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity and promoting the causes of freedom of the press and liberal and progressive journalism both in the UK and elsewhere. Since 1993, The Scott Trust has also been the owner of The Observer, the world's oldest Sunday newspaper.

The Trust is the ultimate custodian of the organisation's values, ethics and reputation, and holds responsibility for:

- Appointing the editor-in-chief and safeguarding the independence of our reporting
- Appointing the GMG board chair and overseeing the GMG board
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- Approving annual budget, capital allocation and investment plans
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In addition candidates will be able to evidence a deep expertise in either:

Finance:
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Please send your latest CV and a cover letter which states how you meet the criteria for the post to karen.walter@theguardian.com. The closing date for applications is Sunday 11th June 2023

Non UK nationals with the required skill-sets and experience will also be considered.

The Scott Trust

Chipmaker Nvidia valued above $1tn as investors back AI boom

Lauren Aratani and agencies

The US chipmaker Nvidia reached a $1tn valuation yesterday as investors continued to rally around the company, which produces chips used to power artificial intelligence technology.

The company's shares started to rise a week ago after it announced better than expected revenue forecasts.

Nvidia's valuation rose to $940bn after a forecast suggesting revenues would hit $11bn for the three months to the end of July – more than 50% higher than the $7.2bn expected by investors.

Shares rose another 4.2% yesterday, bringing Nvidia over the trillion-dollar edge – the first chipmaker to reach the milestone.

Other companies with trillion-dollar valuations include household names such as Meta, Amazon and Alphabet, Google's parent company.

Nvidia is the ninth company in history to reach the valuation, according to Bloomberg. On a call with analysts on 24 May, when Nvidia announced its forecasts, its CEO, Jensen Huang, said the company was benefiting from artificial intelligence's "iPhone moment," as interest in the technology has rocketed since the introduction of OpenAI's ChatGPT in November.

"We are seeing incredible orders to retool the world's data centres," said Huang. "I think you are seeing the beginning of … a 10-year transition to basically recycle or reclaim the world's data centres and build it out as accelerated computing."

Nvidia was founded in 1993 and, for much of its early history, designed chips used for video games. The company found growth around the boom in cryptocurrency as its processing technology was used for mining digital coins, but as the crypto "winter" settled in, Nvidia's share price declined over the course of 2022.

As the largest chipmaker for AI technology, Nvidia is benefiting from heavy Wall Street investment as companies race to adapt and apply the technology. The chips provide the heavy processing power needed to develop new applications. UBS estimated that developing ChatGPT took 10,000 Nvidia chips.

"Nvidia is the poster child for AI at the moment," said Thomas Hayes, the chair of Great Hill Capital. "The market is coming to terms with if this AI trend is real."

Other companies involved with the AI chipmaking supply chain have enjoyed an Nvidia ripple effect boost in their share prices, including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, which manufactures chips designed by Nvidia, and ASML, a Dutch company that makes equipment used by Taiwan Semiconductor.

Some analysts have voiced scepticism over whether Nvidia's rapid growth is intensified hype that will eventually settle down, especially as interest rates remain high. Bank of America analyst Michael Hartnett said the rally behind AI technology could be a "baby bubble", as past bubbles began with free-flowing investment that ended with the Federal Reserve driving up interest rates.

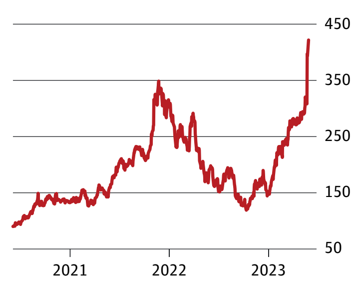
Michael Mullaney, director of global research for Boston Partners, told Bloomberg that Wall Street's interest in AI feels "frenzy-ish". "These are good companies. They are not going bankrupt. But people are starting to pay exorbitant prices for them," he said.

The Federal Reserve implied this month it could pause rise to interest rates, which are currently 5% to 5.25%, but said that it would continue to assess whether more increases are necessary.

AI is also starting to become a political issue as US companies compete with China to produce microchips, and policymakers have started to ask questions about the regulation of AI technology.

Nvidia's share price

Daily high, $



Source: Refinitiv



◀ *Amazon workers on strike outside its Coventry warehouse in a long-running battle for union recognition*

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAEME ROBERTSON/THE GUARDIAN

Amazon UK to allow parents to opt to work only over term time

Joanna Partridge

Parents and grandparents who work in Amazon's UK warehouses will in future be able to opt to work only in term time, amid a row over pay and terms with the GMB union, which is fighting the firm for recognition.

The US online retailer said the new contracts would guarantee those who care for school-age children, including guardians, time off during school holidays, including six weeks in the summer, plus two weeks at Easter and Christmas.

Amazon said it had trialled the contracts at three sites, after worker feedback, and these were being phased in across all of its fulfilment centres, where employees store, pick and pack products. They will be introduced to sorting centres and delivery hubs across the UK this year.

The company said those on the new contract would be entitled to full-time benefits, and it hoped the move would encourage more people back to work.

It has also launched a flexible part-time contract, for a minimum of 80 hours a month, that allows employees to pick suitable shifts, whether part-day or full-day in the daytime or night, and weekdays or weekends.

Amazon will hope the move can attract potential candidates looking for flexible employment, despite two recent rounds of job cuts that culled nearly 30,000 employees worldwide.

The offer of new contracts comes as Amazon is locked in a dispute with the GMB, after months of strikes at its Coventry warehouse. GMB members at the huge Coventry centre have taken 16 days of strike action since January, in what was the first walkout against Amazon in the UK.

They have been demanding a pay rise to £15 an hour, from £11, and have previously said they were frustrated by the company's refusal to talk.

The GMB has said it represents a majority of workers at the Coventry site, and has made an application to a government body, the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), for statutory recognition.

Neil Travis, Amazon's regional operations director, told the BBC: "We are working with the CAC as part of the GMB's formal application for recognition."

France's first electric vehicle battery plant set to create 2,000 jobs

Kim Willsher
Paris

France's first electric car battery plant has opened in a former mining heartland as part of Emmanuel Macron's "reindustrialisation" plan.

Three government ministers and numerous local officials attended the inauguration of the Automative Cells Company's (ACC) gigafactory near Lens, seen as the first step towards France challenging China's dominance in the sector.

ACC, which is equally owned by TotalEnergies, Jeep-maker Stellantis and Mercedes-Benz, has received a €1.3bn (£1.1bn) package of state aid from France, Germany and Italy as part of a €7bn plan to build a string of new facilities across the countries.

The Lens plant, which will begin production this summer, is expected to eventually create 2,000 jobs and produce 800,000 batteries a year.

The area of northern France, which has been hit by industrial decline, has been named "Battery Valley". This month the Taiwanese battery-maker ProLogium chose Dunkirk in the region for its first foreign facility.

Battery Valley has the support of the French president who announced a range of green measures and tax credits – including electric vehicle (EV) subsidies – aimed at attracting billions in new investment to create jobs and increase manufacturing from 10% of economic output to 15%.

By contrast, Britain has been warned it is losing the EV battery race. This month, three major vehicle makers called on the UK government to renegotiate the Brexit deal, saying elements of it threaten the future of the country's automotive industry.

Ford, Jaguar Land Rover and Stellantis, which also owns the Vauxhall, Peugeot and Citroën brands, warned the transition to EVs will be hit unless the UK and EU delay stricter "rules of origin", due to kick in next year, that could add tariffs on car exports.

France aims to be self-sufficient in vehicle battery production by 2027.

Local mayor Jean Michel Dupont said the ACC factory was good news for the high-unemployment area. "Instead of having a wasteland, we have a fine company coming to set up here," Dupont said.

800,000

The number of electric vehicle batteries a year the new gigafactory near Lens is expected to produce

£1.1bn

The package of state aid given to the Automative Cells Company by France, Germany and Italy


Operation Smile
CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE FOREVER
Dilan's life was transformed by free cleft surgery
Dilan, before surgery
Dilan, after surgery
A new smile gave Dilan the happy, healthy future every child deserves.
Looking at Dilan now, it's hard to believe this beautiful boy once faced social stigma and isolation because of a cleft lip. When his mum Sandy saw her baby for the first time, she was thrown into despair – how could she ever afford surgery, and would Dilan be safe?
Operation Smile's medical volunteers welcomed her with open arms and gave Dilan the free, safe cleft surgery he needed to thrive. With your help we can bring safe surgery and vital services like nutritional support, dentistry and speech therapy to thousands more children around the world.
Donate today and change a child's life forever
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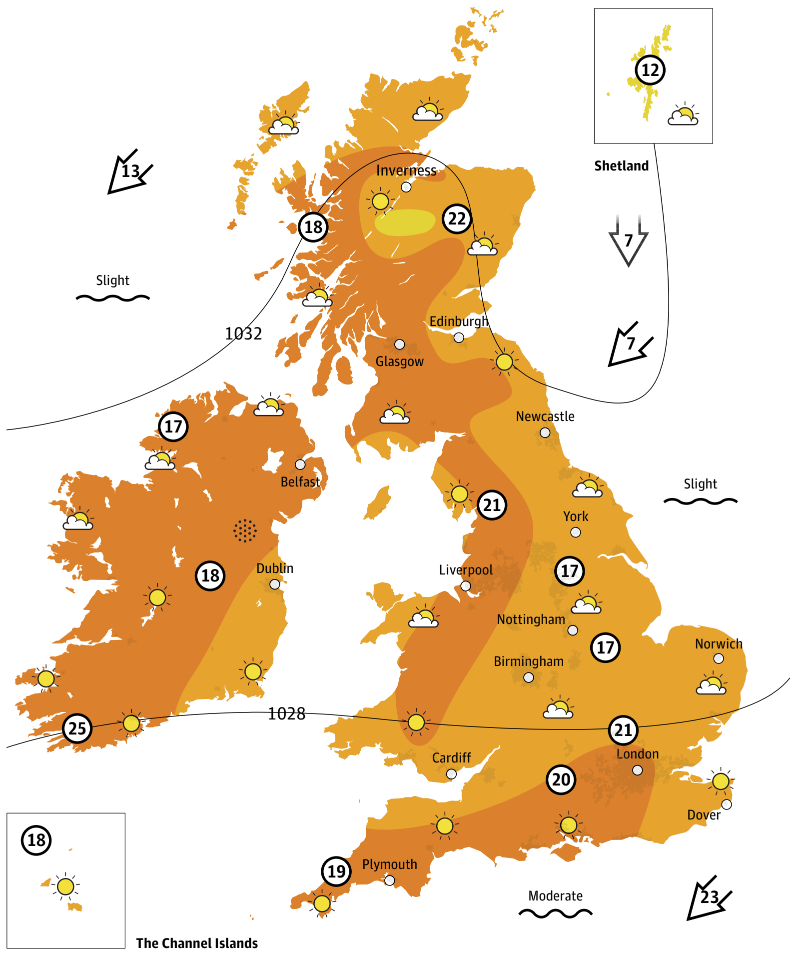

The POWER of PISTACHIOS
SHOCKING FACT
PISTACHIOS
ARE LOADED WITH
ANTIOXIDANTS
In a recent study conducted by Cornell University and published in the journal, *Nutrients*, the antioxidant power of American-grown pistachios was measured using the Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) and Cellular Antioxidant Activity (CAA) testing protocols. For more information, visit AmericanPistachios.co.uk
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AMERICAN QUALITY
PISTACHIOS
California Grown
AmericanPistachios.co.uk

Weather
Wednesday 31 May 2023

UK and Ireland Noon today

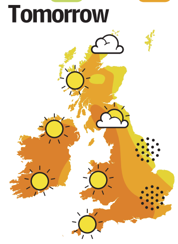
Sunny · Mist · Fog
Sunny intervals · Hazy
Mostly cloudy
Overcast/dull
Sunny showers
Sunny and heavy showers
Light showers
Rain · Sleet · Light snow
Snow showers
Heavy snow · Ice
Thundery rain
Thundery showers
Temperature, ºC
Wind speed, mph · Windy

35C · 30 · 25 · 20 · 15 · 10 · 5 · 0 · -5 · -10 · -15 · -20

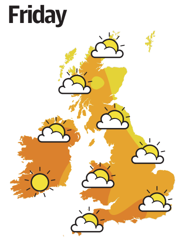


Forecast

Low 8 High 20
Tomorrow



Low 9 High 19
Friday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

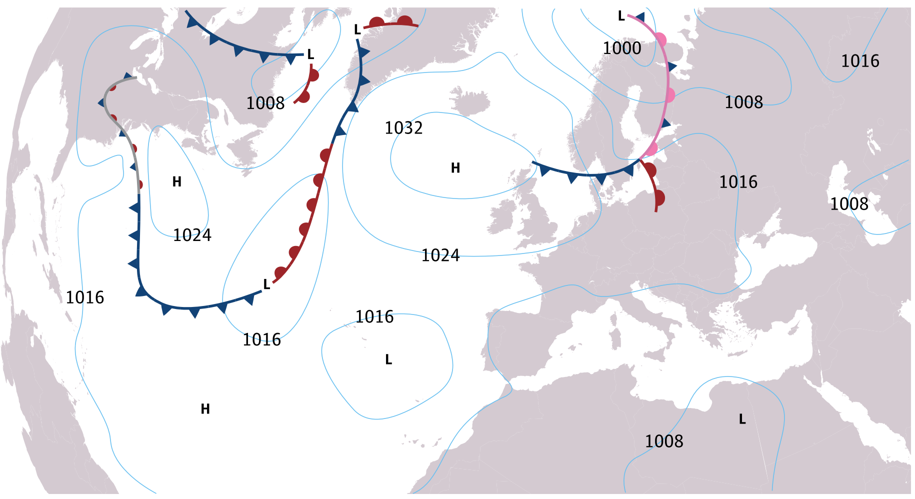
Latest	
29 May 2023	424.76
Weekly average	
21 May 2023	423.91
30 May 2022	421.31
30 May 2013	400.25
Pre-industrial base	280
Safe level	350

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

City	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	9 – 22	0%	Low
Manchester	7 – 20	25%	Low
Edinburgh	9 – 19	0%	Low
Belfast	9 – 23	0%	Low
Birmingham	8 – 19	25%	Low
Brighton	10 – 19	0%	Low
Bristol	9 – 19	25%	Low
Cardiff	10 – 18	25%	Low
Newcastle	8 – 17	0%	Low
Penzance	12 – 17	25%	Low

Atlantic front



Cold front
Warm front
Occluded front
Trough

High tides

Source: © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Times are local UK times

Aberdeen	--	--	**1129**	3.5m
Avonmouth	**0447**	10.6m	**1721**	10.8m
Barrow	**0927**	7.7m	**2155**	7.8m
Belfast	**0900**	3.1m	**2138**	3.0m
Cobh	**0309**	3.4m	**1534**	3.5m
Cromer	**0438**	4.1m	**1644**	4.3m
Dover	**0906**	5.6m	**2120**	5.8m
Dublin	**0942**	3.5m	**2209**	3.5m
Galway	**0310**	4.1m	**1537**	4.3m
Greenock	**1001**	3.0m	**2309**	2.9m
Harwich	**0938**	3.4m	**2154**	3.4m
Holyhead	**0819**	4.7m	**2055**	4.8m
Hull	**0413**	6.1m	**1623**	6.2m
Leith	**0017**	4.5m	**1242**	4.6m
Liverpool	**0902**	7.8m	**2132**	7.9m
London Bridge	--	--	**1139**	6.0m
Lossiemouth	**0939**	3.3m	**2220**	3.4m
Milford Haven	**0400**	5.7m	**1630**	5.7m
Newquay	**0256**	5.6m	**1525**	5.7m
North Shields	**0124**	4.1m	**1332**	4.3m
Oban	**0347**	3.2m	**1626**	3.2m
Penzance	**0228**	4.6m	**1459**	4.6m
Plymouth	**0317**	4.6m	**1556**	4.6m
Portsmouth	**0934**	3.9m	**2158**	4.2m
Southport	**0824**	7.5m	**2054**	7.6m
Stornoway	**0454**	3.9m	**1731**	3.9m
Weymouth	**0329**	0.7m	**1611**	0.8m
Whitby	**0156**	4.6m	**1405**	4.7m
Wick	**0910**	2.8m	**2152**	2.8m
Workington	**0928**	6.9m	**2200**	7.0m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0449
Sun sets	2106
Moon rises	1649
Moon sets	0306
Full Moon	4 June



Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2023

Lighting up

Belfast	2149 to 0456
Birm'ham	2118 to 0451
Brighton	2103 to 0453
Bristol	2117 to 0500
Carlisle	2137 to 0441
Cork	2142 to 0521
Dublin	2142 to 0504
Glasgow	2149 to 0441
Harlech	2130 to 0458
Inverness	2200 to 0427
London	2106 to 0449
M'chester	2125 to 0448
Newcastle	2133 to 0435
Norwich	2107 to 0437
Penzance	2122 to 0518

Butterflywatch

The manicured greens and fairways of golf courses are not famed for being biodiversity hotspots. But they could be, and Llanymynech, a club on the border of England and Wales, is showing the way.

Its edges are flower- and insect-rich limestone grassland that supports 30 butterfly species and forms part of a site of special scientific interest. But when sheep-grazing stopped 50 years ago, this meadowland became a dense thicket of sycamore, hazel and ash.

As rewilding schemes show, scrub can be brilliant for some wildlife but less positive if it smothers flower-filled grassland. In what is believed to be a first for a golf club, Llanymynech took the lead in a £91,000 project funded by Natural Resources Wales to clear scrub and restore the grassland.

This will help early-summer butterflies flying now, including the rare and declining grizzled skipper, the small pearl-bordered fritillary and the dingy skipper.

"We hope the golfers will appreciate the butterflies and wildflowers while enjoying their game," said the naturalist Simon Spencer, who oversaw the project. The grassland will be lightly grazed by cows to maximise biodiversity.
Patrick Barkham

Around the world

Algiers	22	Lisbon	23
Ams'dam	20	Madrid	25
Athens	24	Malaga	27
Auckland	17	Melb'rne	19
B Aires	18	Mexico C	28
Bangkok	35	Miami	30
Barcelona	23	Milan	26
Basra	42	Mombasa	30
Beijing	27	Moscow	16
Berlin	25	Mumbai	34
Bermuda	23	N Orleans	30
Brussels	23	Nairobi	24
Budapest	26	New Delhi	33
C'hagen	20	New York	23
Cairo	35	Oslo	25
Cape Town	17	Paris	26
Chicago	30	Perth	19
Corfu	26	Prague	23
Dakar	30	Reykjavik	12
Dhaka	37	Rio de J	24
Dublin	17	Rome	24
Florence	26	Shanghai	26
Gibraltar	25	Singapore	32
H Kong	35	Stockh'm	20
Harare	25	Strasb'g	27
Helsinki	17	Sydney	22
Istanbul	25	Tel Aviv	27
Jo'burg	17	Tenerife	26
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	20
K'mandu	33	Toronto	30
Kabul	23	Vancouv'r	17
Kingston	31	Vienna	24
Kolkata	38	Warsaw	23
L Angeles	20	Wash'ton	25
Lagos	31	Well'ton	16
Lima	23	Zurich	23

French Open

Seyboth Wild sends Medvedev crashing out

Page 37 →

Football

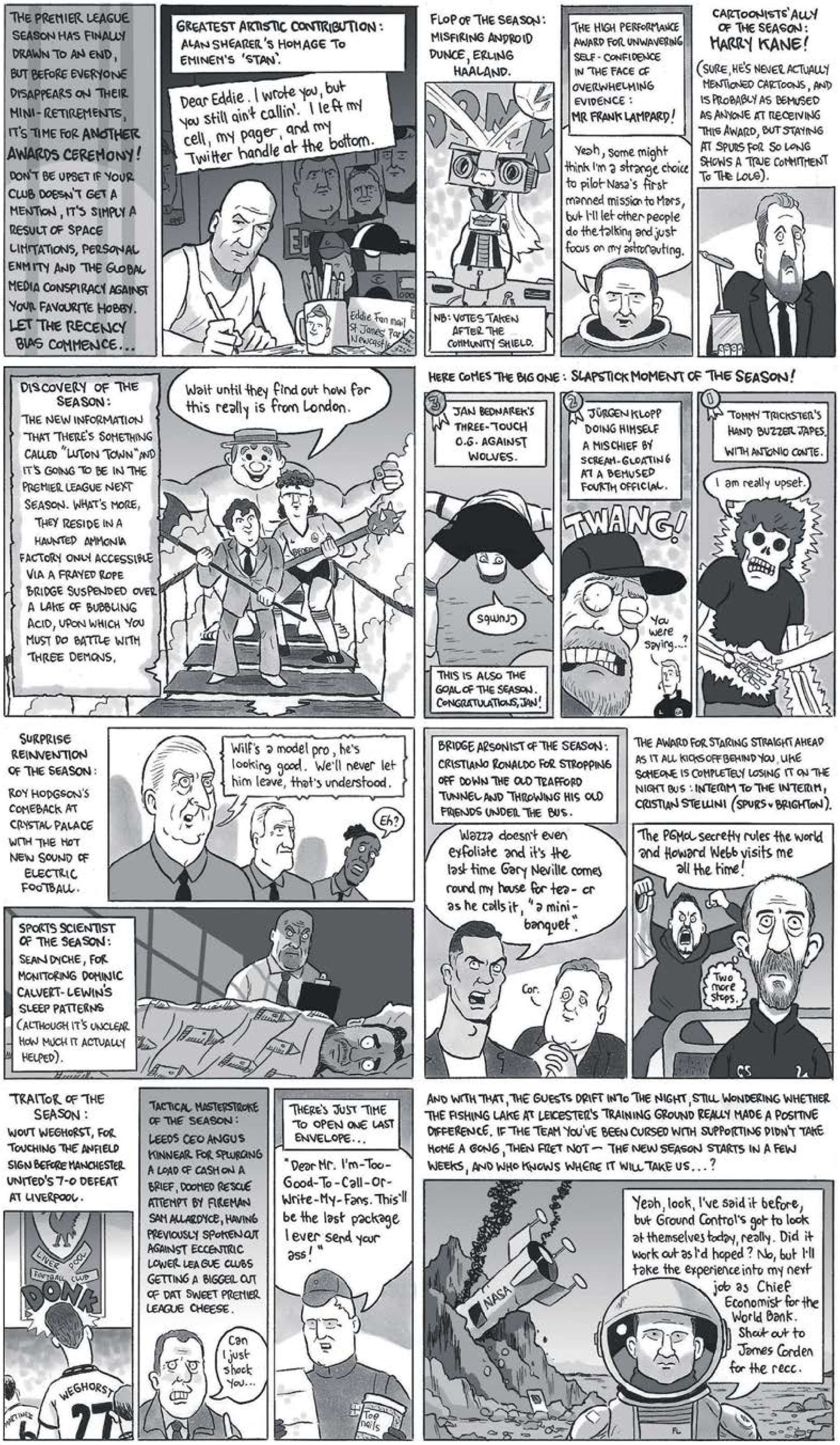
Inside year one of the Todd Boehly era at Chelsea

Jacob Steinberg, page 38 →



Sport

David Squires on … the good, bad and Lampard of the 2022-23 Premier League



David Squires archive Peruse our resident cartoonist's previous work at *theguardian.com/profile/david-squires*

RFU extension prolongs players' uncertainty over their futures

Continued *from back page*

consortium. As of lunchtime yesterday the RFU had not received the documentation and the union has been chasing it for months.

An extension would give the consortium more time to complete the takeover but there is scepticism as to what can be achieved in a week given the length of time already taken.

The uncertainty would also be prolonged for Irish staff and playing squad, who have been seeking to line up moves in the event the club are suspended. Henry Arundell is on Bath's radar, Paddy Jackson on Newcastle's and Tom Pearson is attracting interest from Bath, Bristol and a host of other suitors.

The RFU is desperate to avoid a third club falling into the abyss inside eight months after Worcester and Wasps both went into administration. Neither condition laid out when the RFU issued yesterday's deadline has been met, but the union's willingness to provide an extension demonstrates its desperation, alongside that of Premiership Rugby Limited. The flipside is the potential for another drawn-out saga and there is an acceptance that Worcester and Wasps should not have been allowed to start this season.

Losing another club would heap more pressure on both the RFU and PRL. In November, Sweeney was accused of being "asleep on the job", while he and his PRL counterpart, Simon Massie-Taylor, were also blamed for "failure on an epic scale" at a parliamentary inquiry into the demises of Worcester and Wasps.



◀ *Brentford's Gtech Community Stadium may no longer house its Premiership Rugby side London Irish from next week* ANDREW FOSKER/SECONDS LEFT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Results

Football

FIFA UNDER-20 WORLD CUP
Last 16 USA 4 New Zealand 0; Uzbekistan 0 Israel 1

EUROPEAN UNDER-17 CHAMPIONSHIP
Semi-finals Poland 3 Germany 5; Spain 1 France 3
Fifth place playoff England 4 Switzerland 2

Cricket

VITALITY T20 BLAST
North Group

Trent Bridge Yorkshire 180-7 (DJ Malan 95no, Shan Masood 34; JA Brooks 4-51). Nottinghamshire 174-4 (AD Hales 53, C Munro 46). Yorkshire win by eight runs.

South Group

Chelmsford Gloucestershire 195-7 (BG Charlesworth 52, CDJ Dent 33). Essex 196-7 (RJ Das 69, FIN Khushi 34, T Westley 31no). Essex win by three wickets.

Canterbury Somerset 154 (TA Lammonby 34). Kent 112 (BGF Green 3-19). Somerset win by 13 runs (DLS Method).

Tennis

FRENCH OPEN (Roland Garros, Paris)

Men: First round: T PAUL (US, 16) bt D Stricker (Swi) 6-3 6-2 6-4; **N Jarry** (Chl) bt H Dellien (Bol) 6-4 6-4 6-2; **C RUUD** (Nor, 4) bt E Ymer (Swe) 6-4 6-3 6-2; **G Olivieri** (Arg) bt G Mpetshi Perricard (Fr) 7-6 (7-3) 4-6 4-6 7-5 6-1; **M Purcell** (Aus) bt J Thompson (Aus) 7-5 1-6 6-4 6-4; **Y NISHIOKA** (Jpn, 27) bt JJ Wolf (US) 1-6 3-6 6-4 6-4 6-3; **A Molcan** (Svk) bt H Gaston (Fr) 6-1 7-6 (7-4) 6-4; **A ZVEREV** (Ger, 22) bt L Harris (SA) 7-6 (8-6) 7-6 (7-0) 6-1; **G Zeppieri** (It) bt A Bublik (Kaz) 6-0 4-6 4-6 6-3 7-5; **A Vavassori** (It) bt M KECMANOVIC (Ser, 31) 5-7 2-6 7-6 (10-8) 7-6 (7-3) 7-6 (11-9); **E Ruusuvuori** (Fin) bt G Barrère (Fr) 6-2 6-7 (7-9) 5-7 6-1 6-4; **F CERÚNDOLO** (Arg, 23) bt J Munar (Sp) 6-1 2-6 7-6 (7-5) 6-1; **H RUNE** (Den, 6) bt C Eubanks (US) 6-4 3-6 7-6 (7-2) 6-2; **T FRITZ** (US, 9) bt M Mmoh (US) 6-2 6-1 6-1; **T Seyboth Wild** (Br) bt D MEDVEDEV (Rus, 2) 7-6 (7-5) 6-7 (6-8) 2-6 6-3 6-4; **G DIMITROV** (Bul, 28) bt T Skatov (Kaz) 6-0 6-3 6-2; **A Rinderknech** (Fr) bt R Gasquet (Fr) 6-4 2-6 6-2 7-6 (7-4); **G Pella** (Arg) bt Q Halys (Fr) 6-4 6-7 (7-9) 2-6 7-6 (7-4) 7-6 (10-4); **Y Hanfmann** (Ger) bt T Monteiro (Br) 6-3 7-5 6-7 (6-8) 6-7 (2-7) 6-4; **G Monfils** (Fr) bt S Baez (Arg) 3-6 6-3 7-5 1-6 7-5.

Women: First round: M Andreeva (Rus) bt A Riske-Armritraj (US) 6-2 6-1; **D Parry** (Fr) bt A KALININA (Ukr, 25) 6-2 6-3; **Wang X** (Chn) bt M BOUZKOVA (Cz, 31) 6-4 7-6 (7-5); **R Peterson** (Swe) bt F Ferro (Fr) 6-2 6-0; **O JABEUR** (Tun, 7) bt L Bronzetti (It) 6-4 6-1; **O Danilovic** (Ser) bt K Kozlova (Ukr) 6-3 6-2; **O Dodin** (Fr) bt S Janicijevic (Fr) 0-6 6-2 6-1; **C GAUFF** (US, 6) bt R Masarova (Sp) 3-6 6-1 6-2; **L Noskova** (Cz) bt D Kovinic (Mnt) 6-3 2-1 ret; **J Grabher** (Aut) bt A Rus (Neth) 6-3 6-2; **C Liu** (US) bt Y In-Albon (Swi) 6-1 6-4; **L Tsurenko** (Ukr) bt B KREJCIKOVA (Cz, 13) 6-2 6-4; **E RYBAKINA** (Kaz, 4) bt B Fruhvirtova (Cz) 6-4 6-2; **J Paolini** (It) bt S CIRSTEA (Rom, 30) 7-5 2-6 6-2; **I SWIATEK** (Pol, 1) bt C Bucsa (Sp) 6-4 6-0; **L Davis** (US) bt Zhu L (Chn) 6-3 6-3; **S Sorribes Tormo** (Sp) bt C Burel (Fr) 7-6 (7-0) 6-2; **P Martic** (Cro) bt S ROGERS (US, 32) 3-6 6-3 6-2; **E Navarro** (US) bt E Andreeva (Rus) 6-2 3-6 6-4; **B Andreescu** (Can) bt V AZARENKA (Blr, 18) 2-6 6-3 6-4.

Fixtures

Football
Uefa Europa League Final Sevilla v Roma (8pm)
Fifa Under-20 World Cup
Last 16 Argentina v Italy (10pm); Brazil v Tunisia (6.30pm); Colombia v Slovakia (6.30pm); England v Nigeria (10pm)
Cricket
Vitality T20 Blast
North Group Northants v Warwickshire, Northampton (6.30pm). **South Group** Hampshire v Surrey, Ageas Bowl (7pm); Middlesex v Glamorgan, Northwood (4.30pm)
Charlotte Edwards Cup
Pool Stage Sunrisers v Storm, Northampton (2.30pm); Vipers v Thunder, Ageas Bowl (3pm)

Greg Wood's racing tips

Newton Abbot **1.55** Carrigeen Kampala **2.30** Ballinsker **3.00** Basford **3.30** Chief Black Robe **4.00** Sherborne **4.30** Diligent **5.03** Charlie My Boy

Beverley **2.10** Snow Berry **2.40** Lastingham **3.10** Beltane **3.40** Sidney's Son **4.10** Shaladar **4.40** Krystal Maze **5.12** Cloudy Rose

Hamilton **2.20** Abate **2.50** Grecian Princess **3.20** Swiss Ace (nap) **3.50** Where's Jeff **4.20** Arranmore **4.50** Tiamat **5.20** Breguet Boy

Warwick **5.40** Nickelsonthedime **6.10** Allihies **6.40** Guinness Affair **7.10** Everyonesgame **7.40** Karannelle **8.10** Junior Massini **8.40** Jeudidee

Cartmel **5.50** Battle Of Toro **6.20** Idealdes Villerets **6.50** Diamant Sur Canape **7.20** Sword Of Fate **7.50** Post No Bills (nb) **8.20** Time Leader **8.50** Our Laura B



Fully focused on Ashes success

Australia will rely on Marnus Labuschagne to score the bulk of their runs when the Ashes series against England begins on 16 June
DAVID GRAY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

'Test cricket has been so entertaining … the game's coming alive'

Marnus Labuschagne, the world's No 1 Test batter, on Ashes prospects and why Cardiff is his second home

Simon Burnton

Marnus Labuschagne has been putting the glamour into Glamorgan since 2019, but still there is something slightly hallucinatory about finding the world's best Test batter at Sophia Gardens. Yet here he sits, snacking on biltong - you can take the kid out of South Africa and all that - while overlooking the outfield at the end of a day's play, a few weeks before Australia steal him away to join their Test squad for the Ashes and World Test Championship. "I love coming to Cardiff," he says. "I love the people, I love the club, my family loves being here. It's kind of like a second home."

His actual second home for the last couple of years was a Cardiff house shared with his Glamorgan and occasional international teammate Michael Neser, who like Labuschagne was born in South Africa, moved to Australia as a child (Neser was nine, Labuschagne a year older) and settled in Queensland. But now he has a baby, so it didn't seem like such a good idea.

"We're staying right across the road from each other," Labuschagne says. "It's really nice to share the experience, to have been able to share this journey with someone else, a really close friend." These days, though, Neser is not the only one of those he has here: "I've played with these guys for four years. We're good friends, our wives, kids - you know, you're building real relationships and a culture and a great feeling."

He says this to point out a contrast with the lifestyles of those cricketers who choose a more itinerant, franchise-focused path, vaulting from continent to continent. "I mean, I haven't been on that journey, but it can probably be one that's a bit lonelier."

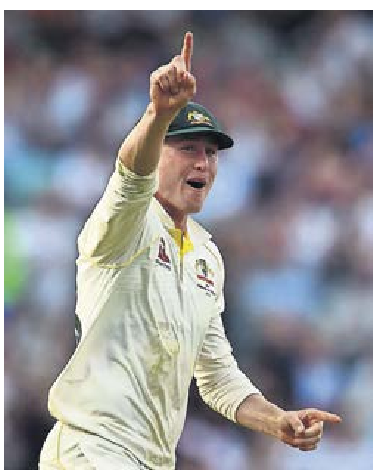
Labuschagne does not seem drawn to the superficial. When he joins a club he stays not for weeks but years, when he is interested in something he burrows deep into it. He is famously keen on coffee: the coffee machine in his flat costs as much as a second-hand car, and he has a business selling mail-order beans across Australia.

"I'm passionate about cricket. I spend a lot of my spare time thinking about how I can get better, ways I can do things, trying to expand how I can play. With coffee it's like a passion - I want to know how to make a really nice coffee, but I want to know about the beans, the flavours. I don't want to say I have an addictive personality, but I love going down that rabbit hole, thinking how good can I possibly be at that one thing, no matter what it is."

At the one thing he does for a living he has become extraordinary, but when Glamorgan first signed him it was to little fanfare. Then 24, he had played five Tests and ticked off every batting position from three to seven, scoring one half-century. His Test ranking stood at 110, his first-class average a shade under 32. But in his first County Championship game he produced an innings of 121; in his second, 137; in his fourth, 182.

"When I first came over I'd had a poor finish to the season at home. So it was just about playing more first-class cricket, getting more opportunities to keep getting better, and the bonus was an Ashes at the end. But I was probably a fair way out of the mixer at that stage."

When an injury to Steve Smith made Australia seek the sport's first concussion substitute midway through the second Test of that summer, Labuschagne stepped in. He scored a half-century in that match at Lord's, and then another in his next innings, and another, and another. By late 2019 he was ranked No 4 in the world, and by the end of 2021 he was No 1.



▲ *Marnus Labuschagne says he 'would love to play in the IPL'*

"I always believed in my ability, but I think to get to this level you need so many things to fall in the right place. There's no real way I can explain how it all unfolded so perfectly leading into those Ashes. Now I look at it and think it's a bit unbelievable, the way things have panned out."

Labuschagne has largely forsaken Twenty20 cricket - though he says he "would love to play in the IPL" and is "always thinking about going back in the auction" - but he has no concern about the rising tide of franchise cricket submerging Tests altogether. "Obviously there's more pathways for young players now. Not every pathway for a young cricketer is: 'I want to represent my country.' It might be: 'I want to play in the IPL.' But I don't think that's for everyone, right?

"There's a small margin of players that can go down that path and the unfortunate thing about that path is it drops off very quickly. You have a couple of bad tournaments and, all of a sudden, who are you contracted to? But it comes down to each to their own. If money is the driver and people see that they can earn more playing white-ball rather than Test cricket, then people are going to take that route. But I certainly don't think that's going to be for everyone."

Besides, Test cricket is fun, right? "In the last three, four years it's been unbelievable. It's been so entertaining. The 2019 Ashes was an unbelievable series. Australia v India in Australia, *really* good series. We just had a good series in India on some diabolical turning wickets and then you go New Zealand v England, Pakistan v England. I mean, the game's coming alive. So it's going to be an entertaining summer."

Australia play India in the World Test Championship final at the Oval next week before rolling straight into the Ashes, starting at Edgbaston on 16 June. Since being thrashed in Australia 18 months ago England have been rejuvenated, but perhaps enough has been seen of their new approach for opponents to start figuring out the faultlines.

"England were at the stage where they just needed to find a new method and they just needed a shake-up," Labuschagne says. "And whenever something new comes on board, people don't necessarily know how to react. Like anything, the more they play a certain way, people are going to be able to read it and come up with plans and ways to negate that method. At the end of the day, time will tell if that's a method that's going to be upstanding, or if it is not. But I'm not here to question England's method - on paper it's worked very well."

Labuschagne's own method is perhaps a little more sober but it has been upstanding. "When I went out to play that first innings [in 2019] I just thought: 'This is a free hit - people aren't expecting much from me here,'" he says, but there are no free hits when you're the world's No 1 Test batter. "Yeah, people are expecting me to score runs more consistently now, but it's just about focusing on one ball at a time and trying to stick to the process. As soon as you get too fixated on runs and needing to score, you find yourself searching for it and that's when you start not having success. It's about trusting your game."

Labuschagne has taken no short cuts on his way to establishing that trust. He is renowned as a workaholic, fuelled by the desire to go out there and play, as often and as successfully as possible (and also by coffee). "I get to do what I love. I get to do what I dreamt of when I was three years old. And being able to live that dream is a big privilege. I think the day you forget that and take it for granted is probably the day it slips through your hands."

England bring in Tongue for debut in Ireland clash

Simon Burnton

Josh Tongue has been parachuted into the England team for the first Test of the summer against Ireland starting tomorrow, with the Worcestershire seamer set to make his debut after edging Mark Wood and Chris Woakes out of the side.

England's head coach, Brendon McCullum, described Tongue as "a big strong lad" who "bowls quite fast and has some real skills" after watching him during the team's first training session of the summer on Monday. After their second, McCullum broke the news to Tongue that he would play against Ireland.

"I bowled at some of the lads on Monday," Tongue said. "I felt like I bowled nicely and obviously I was going in with no expectations to be playing at all, and just bowling at high-class players in the nets was good for me. Baz came up to me just before training finished [yesterday] and gave me the good news. It's an amazing feeling."

Neither Wood nor Woakes are injured, though the former's participation was in doubt as England sought to manage the workload of their one remaining bowler of express pace before the Ashes, which starts at Edgbaston on 16 June. Olly Stone, who might have provided a pace option, has been ruled out of that match with a hamstring strain while Jofra Archer will miss the summer with a recurrence of an elbow injury.

Tongue has his own experience with serious injury having spent 15 months with thoracic outlet syndrome, the compression of nerves in the shoulder, during which he considered retiring from the game altogether. "I'm just proud of myself and how I held in there," he said.

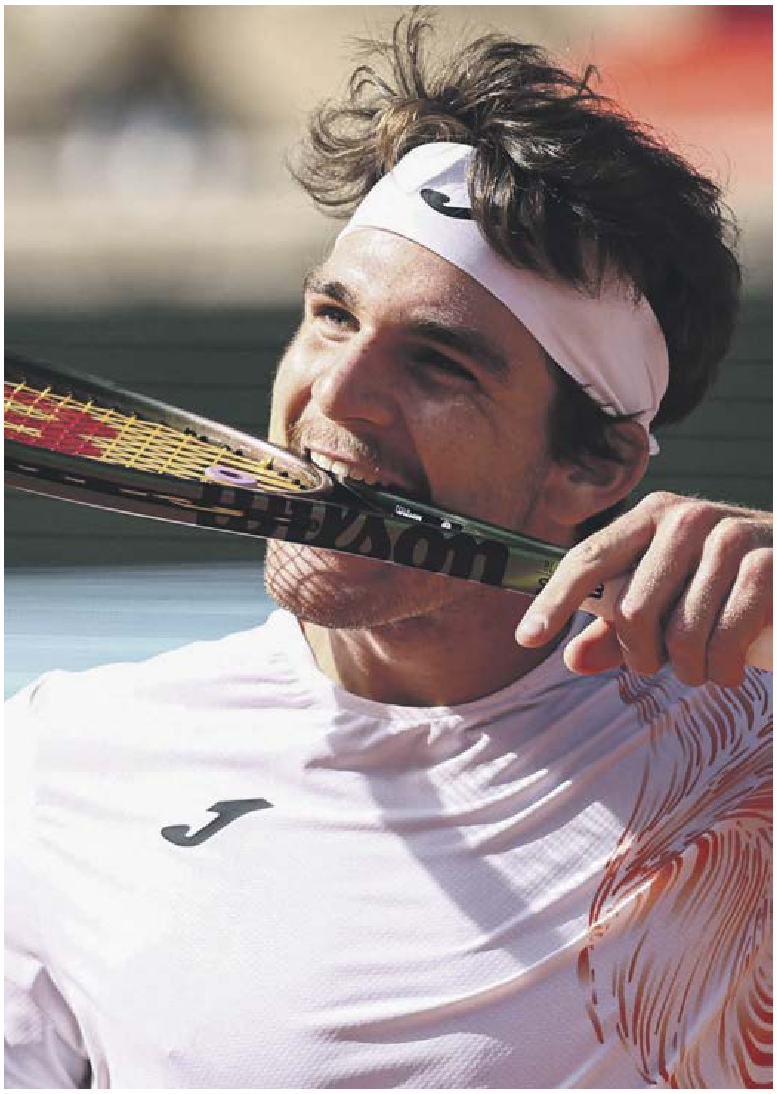
With Ben Stokes unlikely to bowl as he nurses a long-term knee injury, the team's three seamers could be forced to shoulder a considerable workload, and it may be that the avoidance of risk was uppermost in McCullum's mind when the side was selected.

England's top six are unchanged from the side that played throughout the winter, with Jonny Bairstow returning from injury as wicket-keeper in place of Ben Foakes.

England team to play Ireland at Lord's
Ben Duckett, Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (c), Bairstow (w), Stuart Broad, Matthew Potts, Josh Tongue, Jack Leach.



▲ *Chris Woakes has been left out for Worcestershire's Josh Tongue*



◀ *Thiago Seyboth Wild gets his teeth into Paris*
ANNE-CHRISTINE POUJOULAT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Seyboth Wild stuns 'suffering' Medvedev in first-round upset

Brazilian qualifier and world No 172 edges past second seed in five-set classic

Tumaini Carayol
Roland Garros

Daniil Medvedev's clay-court renaissance came to a sudden, bitter end during a windy afternoon yesterday on Court Philippe Chatrier as the second seed was upset 7-6 (5), 6-7 (6), 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the French Open by Thiago Seyboth Wild, a Brazilian qualifier ranked No 172.

After years of discomfort and frustration on clay, Medvedev had arrived at Roland Garros finally competing at an elite level of tennis on the surface, winning his first clay title at the Italian Open in Rome.

In his first match here, however, Medvedev was unable to play with the same level of aggression and assertiveness. He was reduced to scrambling behind the baseline, desperately trying to eke out errors from his opponent. Seyboth Wild, meanwhile, dominated the contest from inside the baseline with his vicious, precise forehand, moving forward to finish off points at the net.

Medvedev did not feel he had played a bad match, but rather his opponent was just too good. "I honestly hope he's gonna play like this later on, because if not I'm gonna be disappointed," the Russian said. "I'm going to be like: 'Why today? Why not in two days?'"

Seyboth Wild was a talented young junior who won the 2018 US Open boys title, but he has since been in the news because of off-court events. In June 2022 the Public Ministry of Rio de Janeiro announced it had issued a "complaint" against Seyboth Wild, meaning it had formally initiated public criminal action on grounds of domestic and psychological violence allegedly committed against his former partner, Thayane Lima. Seyboth Wild has denied the accusations.

In 2021 Rio de Janeiro police had begun investigating the claims after Lima submitted a police report against Seyboth Wild, who was subsequently charged. Lima also detailed the psychological and physical abuse she says she suffered in an interview with UOL. The tennis player was banned from approaching Lima and required to pay her palimony after the split.

Asked about the charges yesterday, Seyboth Wild said: "I don't think it's a subject we should talk about it right here. I don't think it's a question you should be making to anybody. I don't think it comes to you to decide whether it's a place to be spoken of or not."

A strong tour-level result on clay seemed to be on the cards for Seyboth Wild, who was ranked 400th in March and has flitted up the rankings in recent months, winning two challenger titles and reaching a further final. The qualifier is now 26-4 since March.

It initially appeared that the 23-year-old had spectacularly fumbled the opportunity of his life after producing a series of errors from double set point at 6-4 in the second-set tiebreak. Medvedev took advantage of the momentum, establishing a two sets to one lead, but the Brazilian re-established control on top of the baseline and never let go.

As he complimented his opponent's performance, Medvedev said that he felt his game was unsuited to the conditions. With the heavy Wilson balls in the wind, he thought the conditions are far suited to players who can create heavy power and have lively wrists, such as Seyboth Wild, Carlos Alcaraz and Stefanos Tsitsipas.

"[They] have big advantage with these balls, because they can create easy power, which I don't have," Medvedev said. "That was a little bit the case today. He was controlling almost all the points, and I was suffering a lot."

Mirra Andreeva, meanwhile, has cited an interaction with Andy Murray as a lucky charm following the 16-year-old's first grand slam main-draw victory at Roland Garros. Andreeva moved into the second round with an easy 6-2, 6-1 win against Alison Riske-Amritraj.

This month Andreeva reached the fourth round of the Madrid Open. During her run in Madrid, an indirect exchange between Andreeva and Murray went viral on social media. Andreeva described Murray as "beautiful", to which the Scot responded on Twitter: "Imagine how good she's going to be when she gets her eyes fixed."

Andreeva texted Murray congratulations after his Aix-en-Provence ATP Challenger title this month and unexpectedly received a response. "After he won a challenger, I texted him," Andreeva said. "I said: 'Congratulations'. He answered me, so I was really happy about it. He said: 'Thank you, and good luck in Roland Garros.' Maybe that's why I'm playing good now."

'Andy answered my text … that's why I'm playing good'



Mirra Andreeva defeated Alison Riske-Amritraj

Djokovic not likely to face punishment

Continued *from back page*

page that it would contact the French Tennis Federation (FFT) and Association of Tennis Professionals to seek punishment for Djokovic.

However, there is nothing in the grand slam rulebook prohibiting players from making political statements and it is unlikely that Djokovic will face any punishments. The FFT said it would not be taking a stance or making a statement on the situation.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 but Serbia still considers Kosovo as part of its country. Ethnic Serbs make up a clear majority in the northern provinces of Kosovo. In April, Kosovo Serbs boycotted the local elections, with Albanian politicians taking control of the councils despite a turnout of just 3.47% in the northern province. There have subsequently been a number of clashes in Zvecan and other northern municipalities.

Nato peacekeeping forces said 30 of their troops had been injured, some seriously. The Serbia president, Aleksandar Vucic, has said 50 Serb protestors have undergone hospital treatment. Vucic, who put his army on combat alert, was due to meet ambassadors of the UK, the US, China and Russia yesterday.

Djokovic's father was born in Kosovo and he has discussed the subject on a number of occasions. In March, he applauded a crowd at a basketball game between Crvena Zvezda (Red Star) and Valencia as the crowd chanted "Kosovo, Serbia", prompting the KTF to criticise Djokovic's behaviour as "nationalist and chauvinist".

Jeton Hadergjonaj, the KFA president, told PA Media: "Kosovo is an independent country recognised by the ITF, Tennis Europe and the international community. But he continuously attacks us every time he can do it."

However, after his five-set defeat yesterday, the Serbian 31st seed Miomir Kecmanovic said of Djokovic: "I mean, he's a national hero, regardless, in Serbia. Him, being such a big figure, he had the right to react."

'I feel the responsibility to give support'
Novak Djokovic
World No 3

Searching for the right solutions

Regrets and big bucks: inside year one of the Boehly era

Twelve months on since buying Chelsea, the co-owner and Clearlake Capital feel lessons have been learned

Jacob Steinberg

Last week, as the first anniversary of Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital completing their £2.5bn takeover of Chelsea drew closer, the overriding feeling was relief. The season from hell was almost over.

Around the training ground the talk is of widespread misery and players openly looking to leave, though there is plenty of blame to go around. The coaching staff have been shocked at the apathy in training. Frank Lampard, whose time as interim head coach ended on Sunday, has derided the dip in standards. Some people believe that Mauricio Pochettino, whose appointment is an undeniable positive, will be in for a shock when he gets to work.

There is no dressing it up: Boehly and his fellow co-controlling owner, Behdad Eghbali, have presided over a shambles. They have achieved something fascinating by getting through four managers in a season, spending close to £600m on signings and leading Chelsea to a first bottom-half finish since 1996. There has never been anything like it.

Inside the club, though, there is perspective. There is unease at the unflattering media portrayals of Boehly. Suggestions that he is dialling back his involvement in the running of Chelsea because of their decline are dismissed as a misinterpretation. As one figure says, it was never the plan for Boehly to be so visible. Another points to the influence of Eghbali, the driving force behind several key decisions. It is stressed that Eghbali's business partner, José E Feliciano, is another crucial presence.

The insistence is that Boehly's way is always to spend the first year getting under the skin of a new business. The approach is to defer to the experts once they are in situ. But Chelsea are different and, to understand why it has gone so wrong, it is necessary to go back to before they were up for sale. For all the success of the Roman Abramovich era, it is possible to question some of the methodology. Chelsea were lagging behind rivals with more modern set-ups. They were in a state of limbo after Abramovich was subjected to sanctions after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Antonio Rüdiger and Andreas Christensen left on free transfers. Chelsea, unable to plan for the summer market, were playing catch-up as soon as the owners took charge. Recruitment specialists at rival clubs predicted there would be problems. The transition was harder when two Abramovich allies, Marina Granovskaia and Bruce Buck, left. Petr Cech quit as technical and performance adviser. The former Chelsea goalkeeper had been asked to stay.

There was a void. Boehly stepped in as interim sporting director and the pressure grew. Thomas Tuchel, Chelsea's brilliant but demanding manager, was said to be "screaming for signings". Above all Tuchel needed defenders, but tensions soon emerged. The German did not want to be involved in recruitment meetings. Sources were soon predicting a part of the ways.

Sacking Tuchel, who had made Chelsea world and European champions, was not the plan. The owners listened to him on signings. There was surprise when the idea of buying Gabriel Jesus from Manchester City was rejected. Instead the defence was bolstered with Kalidou Koulibaly (£33m), Wesley Fofana (£70m) and Marc Cucurella (£62.5m). Raheem Sterling, the marquee buy, joined from City. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was signed to lead the attack. Denis Zakaria was an afterthought of a loan in midfield.

Chelsea did not look stronger. They made a middling start and there were whispers of Tuchel losing the dressing room. Given the manner of the display in his final game, an insipid 1-0 defeat at Dinamo Zagreb in the Champions League, it was arguably not that much of an outrage when he was fired. His relationship with the board had plummeted but there was still a naivety to letting him go. He has just won the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich and his tactical acumen probably would have kept Chelsea around the top six. There is regret over the speed of his dismissal now.

Tuchel's relationship with the board has healed in recent months. But there was no going back last September. Chelsea were wooed by Graham Potter's reputation as English football's rising star and paid £21.5m to take him and his staff from Brighton. There was absolute faith in Potter. The owners loved him and bantered with him about his so-called glow-up. "Graham, you're a Lamborghini away from being a superstar," Feliciano said.

Potter laughed it off, insisting he would never be caught driving a Lamborghini. But Feliciano would not let it lie. When Chelsea thrashed Milan 3-0 in the Champions League, Feliciano gave Potter a present: a toy Lamborghini in a glass frame.

There was a party atmosphere at the Milan game. Yet results soon dipped. Potter was chopping and changing too much. Players loyal to Tuchel were unconvinced. Potter never lost the dressing room but was he tough enough? One player trained after nights out.

The odds were not stacked in Potter's favour. Chelsea went into overdrive in January, buying seven players and loaning João Félix. Only Jorginho, who joined Arsenal, left. Technical glitches scotched Hakim Ziyech's hopes of joining Paris Saint-Germain on deadline day; there was bemusement when Potter started him against Fulham three days later.

It heightened the impression that Potter was too indecisive. But what chance did he have? The squad was oversized and the dressing room too small. When it came to naming a squad for the Champions League knockout stages Potter omitted Aubameyang, Benoît Badiashile and Noni Madueke. Aubameyang, the only fit striker, had admitted to Potter he was not producing his best form after leaving Barcelona.

Potter had warned against too many signings and told the board that Enzo Fernández, the Argentina midfielder, was overpriced at £106.8m. Chelsea pressed ahead, Eghbali instrumental in talks with Benfica. They did not want to miss out on Fernández. The impression was of an attempt to disrupt the market. Handing out unusually long contracts means Chelsea can use the accounting practice of amortisation to spread the cost of big transfer fees. Chelsea, who are trying to cut their wage bill, believe young players on incentivised eight-year deals will feel they have the club's support. But one big target told Chelsea he would never sign an eight-year deal.

Nonetheless there were signs of a strategy. Last summer's buys were scattergun. Yet Chelsea had spent much of the autumn building a recruitment team. Brighton's Paul Winstanley and Monaco's Laurence Stewart were to take over as sporting directors. Joe Shields left Southampton to become co-director of recruitment and talent. Christopher Vivell left RB Leipzig to become technical director.



Todd Boehly and Chelsea have an important pre-season ahead under new manager Mauricio Pochettino BRADLEY COLLYER/PA

This is not a toy for Boehly, Eghbali and Feliciano. It is a long-term investment



Raheem Sterling's move from City is yet to work out

Clubs such as City have an army of employees working to make life smooth for Pep Guardiola. Chelsea were building from scratch. There was identity to their January buys: Fernández, Badiashile, Madueke, Malo Gusto, Andrey Santos and Mykhailo Mudryk are young and dynamic. There is confidence that Christopher Nkunku will improve a malfunctioning attack. Do not be surprised if the France forward regularly plays as Chelsea's No 9 next season.

But it will not be for Potter. The faith disappeared after Chelsea drew 2-2 with Everton in March. Insiders felt he was under too much pressure. There was alarm over his selections and substitutions. The final straw came when Chelsea lost at home against Aston Villa last month.

There is never a perfect time to sack a manager and Chelsea were just over a week from facing Real Madrid in the Champions League. Yet Eghbali pushed hard for the decision, and Stewart and Winstanley were on board with it. They could not see a way out, although there is modelling to suggest Chelsea's performances were better than their results. Supporters of Potter have argued we would have seen a different Chelsea if Potter had been given pre-season.

We will never find out. Recently Boehly has been heard wondering whether Potter should have had more time. Sacking him has not made Chelsea better. Bruno Saltor, part of Potter's backroom team, took charge of one game and Lampard's return has not worked. Chelsea lost meekly to Madrid and finished 12th. Lampard, who won one of his 11 games, has criticised the standards in training, the team's physicality and the lack of leaders.

The decision to sack Potter was not made on a whim. Criticism that a permanent replacement was not ready is met with a response that Chelsea wanted to take time over the appointment. They met Julian Nagelsmann and Luis Enrique, and looked at several other candidates.

Best practice dictates that well-run clubs have interim and permanent succession plans at the start of every season. Chelsea's sporting structure was not fully in place until February. Why not take time to make sure that Pochettino, who first met Chelsea when they sacked Tuchel, was the right fit? They had to know more about his backroom staff. They had to be sure his reputation was justified; that his motivation was intact after his travails at PSG.

Pochettino is the real deal. The former Tottenham manager improves young players and his man-management is second to none. The summer, though, will be hard. Chelsea's recent accounts showed losses of £121m and they need to trim their squad, although suggestions they are under pressure to sell because of Financial Fair Play concerns are rejected by multiple sources. The aim is simply to make the squad more manageable. Buying clubs may try to take advantage of Chelsea's need to sell.

There will be concerns over identity. Mason Mount, the academy's poster boy, is likely to leave. It is said that raising funds will not be hard. Is that because a host of academy players are about to be sold?

Several players want out. Aubameyang's contract could be terminated by mutual consent, Madrid asked about Kai Havertz last summer and Mateo Kovacic will leave. Players feel the training ground has become a less familiar environment. There was a feeling that the injury crisis was exacerbated by sudden changes to the medical team, though the ownership stands by those changes.

Chelsea, who regard signing a midfielder as more of a priority than a striker, back themselves to get it right. They have had problems off the pitch - Tom Glick, appointed as president of business last summer, is to leave - but it is felt that the previous regime did not do enough to maximise commercial revenue. Confirmation yesterday of Chris Jurasek's appointment as chief executive is cause for hope. The stadium is on the mind. Chelsea's preference remains to expand Stamford Bridge but it is not a simple project. Moving to Earl's Court has not been ruled out.

This is not a toy for Boehly, Eghbali and Feliciano. It is a long-term investment and there is an acceptance that mistakes have been made. Boehly did not know how his comments about a Premier League All-Star game would be received. Sometimes his passion gets the better of him. He was trying to be spontaneous when he told a reporter that Chelsea were going to beat Madrid 3-0. He was trying to motivate him when he entered the dressing room after the defeat against Brighton last month and told the players the season had been embarrassing.

It goes both ways. Year one has been a disaster. Yet Chelsea feel that lessons have been learned. They are confident the next anniversary will be one to celebrate.

1996

*The last time that **Chelsea finished in the bottom half** of the Premier League*

£600m

*The amount of money **Chelsea have spent on new players** since Todd Boehly took over the club*

'When I came to Wolves, a lot of friends asked why'

Julen Lopetegui reflects on a move from Basque Country to Black Country and guiding his new club to safety

Ben Fisher

The Basque Country is the place countless elite coaches call home, among them Unai Emery, Mikel Arteta, Andoni Iraola and Xabi Alonso. But the Spanish region, in the western Pyrenees close to the French border, is famed for something else as Julen Lopetegui, another of those with roots there, can vouch. "More Michelin stars per square kilometre than anywhere else in the world," the Wolves manager says. "So we have a lot! And I know all of them. One of them went to school with me, Martín Berasategui; he has 12 Michelin stars. He was my friend at school."

It explains Lopetegui's interest in hospitality. Growing up, he helped his parents at their restaurant in Asteasu, and he co-owns Asador Imanol, a restaurant in Madrid. As he reflects on those early days in the family business, one sitting, when all the covers were taken, sticks in the memory. "A friend of mine came [in] with a ball," he says. "My job was to attend the flames on the grill - that was my only job. So my father told me to watch 25 one-kilo steaks … big steaks! So I'm looking after the fire and saying: 'It will be OK. For a few seconds, I'll play football.' But it was more like 10 minutes and the steaks all caught on fire! My father comes and they are all on fire. It was the equivalent of one week's wages … all gone! It was my fault. Can you imagine?"

He is at ease speaking in the Wolves canteen - or the Wolves performance kitchen, as the sign overhead says - at their Compton training base, where the mood is rather more relaxed. A couple of hours earlier the players and football staff had enjoyed a barbecue to celebrate Wolves becoming the first top-flight club since Leicester in 2014-2015 to avoid relegation after being bottom on Christmas Day. Safety had been secured with three games to spare. This time, though, Lopetegui was not on the coals. "I am the master of the grill, believe me," he laughs. "We have the best restaurant in the city - it is here. We have very good chefs here. I like trying different restaurants, in Birmingham, in different places."

At the start of this conversation Lopetegui addresses the elephant in the room: his future. He reiterates that he wants clarity over Wolves' plans for the coming months amid financial fair play restraints; the club must make a profit on transfers this summer to avoid exceeding an accumulated £105m loss over a three-year period. But he has been noncommittal about staying despite two years remaining on the contract he signed last November. "The future does not depend on me, it depends on the club," was his verdict on Sunday.

There has been little downtime in the hectic six months since he succeeded Bruno Lage. He enjoys watching the odd television series with his wife, Rosa, to improve his English - Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story is the latest pick - and occasionally plays piano with his daughter, Maria. "I am a frustrated pianist," the 56-year-old laughs. "She doesn't want to do it any more because of her father's frustration … when I want to be alone I like to play piano."

'I was a very disturbing player for a coach because I started to ask a lot of questions'

He is glad he agreed to join the pack at Wolves. "When I came here a lot of friends, family, coaches said: 'Why have you gone there? You don't need that. Stay. Wait.' Because I had before the possibility to come to the Premier League. But I felt that maybe I could test myself, it was a challenge for me as a coach, a different challenge, and I came here without thinking a lot. Fortunately we achieved our aim. We tried to convince the players that the solution is not about me, it's about them. Sometimes players are waiting for a magic solution but it does not exist."

Lopetegui is a manager of great pedigree. He has coached some of the world's best players with Porto, Real Madrid, Spain and Sevilla, whom he led to the Europa League title three years ago. Tonight the six-times winners will compete for the crown again, against Roma in Budapest. But Wolves is the first job - in football at least - where family have followed him through the door. Lopetegui's eldest son, Daniel, a performance analyst who previously worked for MK Dons, works closely with the recruitment department and the sporting director, Matt Hobbs. "They have done very good work. That's why it is a pity that we cannot take advantage of this work this month if we are not able to invest money."

As a goalkeeper for Real Madrid, Barcelona, where he played alongside Pep Guardiola, and Rayo Vallecano he broke every finger. He was obsessed with the game as a kid - it is why he refers to himself as the black sheep of the family - and intrigued by the idea of coaching towards the end of his playing days at Barça with Johan Cruyff. "He was the first coach who made you think: 'Why are we doing this drill?'" He would later pick the brains of Louis van Gaal. "I was a very disturbing player for the coaches because I started to ask a lot of questions."

He has told Daniel to also be inquisitive. "He wants the power of the sporting director, he wants to go this way. He studied [football business and finance] at a university in London. I always tell him: 'It's better they think you are stupid once because you asked, rather than be stupid all your life because you didn't ask.'" Was his son put off coaching because he has witnessed the stresses it brings? Lopetegui laughs. "I think he would prefer to wear a tie and sack the manager!"



◀ *Julen Lopetegui replaced Bruno Lage and revitalised the bottom club Wolves to the extent they survived with three games remaining*

JACK THOMAS/ WOLVES/GETTY

'Better coach, same DNA': Mourinho matures as Roma target more glory

The manager is as motivated as ever with Roma aiming to win a second consecutive European trophy under him

Sid Lowe

Not long ago, an Italian radio show opened the phones for listeners and a final-year biology student called Marta rang in with a problem. Today Marta graduates from university in Rome but, she explained, her dad won't be there with her: he will be in Budapest instead. When it mattered, Roma came first. The story was soon everywhere, the subject of debate, and while not everyone agrees - the club's former captain Daniele De Rossi said he was staying behind to be with his daughter - plenty were on her father's side.

This is only the fourth Uefa final Roma have reached, after all. Half of those have now been under José Mourinho, who has won all five of those he has been at, including last year's Conference League for Roma. That was their first trophy since 2008. If Marta is not happy with Mourinho, everyone else is delighted. Win the Europa League against Sevilla and some think it would be the greatest achievement of his career, bigger even than what he did at Porto or Internazionale.

When he was asked recently about the prospect of Roma reaching the Champions League with an extremely limited budget - something that could be secured in Hungary - Mourinho said that doing so would not just be history or a miracle; it would be Jesus Christ himself turning up in Rome and taking a stroll around the Vatican. Not that he was thinking about that, he insisted, as he prepared his team at their Trigoria training ground: he just wanted to play, to make the fans happy.

Oh, he has. Joy may not always be the word most associated with Mourinho, the manager whose team edged through the semi-final second leg against Bayer Leverkusen with a single shot, less than 30% possession and the ball out of play almost as much as it was in, and as he prepared for this final there was a very pointed question about his way of doing things. On the touchline, in particular. There have been 13 red cards shown to occupants of the bench this season, product of a conscious policy, pressure applied on the officials. Did it really need to be that way, he was asked?

Mourinho sat, listened to this long-flowing Italian monologue, said it was a nice speech and then refused to answer. As the translator began to run through it, the coach stopped him, spitting in English: "Don't waste your time with that shit." If that felt almost comfortingly confrontational, it didn't entirely fit. Those kinds of debates are for the pundits and the purists. The fans, put bluntly, couldn't care less. In fact, in the land of Machiavelli, that only makes it better. The chest out, the competing, the sticking it to the rest, by any means necessary. This is Mourinho's way and it is no exaggeration to say they *love* him.

They are sixth in the league, their football may not be the finest, but the Stadio Olimpico has been full for 32 games in a row; the 33rd may be tonight when a giant screen shows the match. There was excitement from the start, a welcome that spoke of warmth, but now it is something else.

So, he says, is he. It is 20 years since his first European title, with Porto in this competition's forerunner. Five finals, five victories. A sixth final coming, unexpectedly. Some claim these games were gone, glory days behind him, but no. Asked how he has changed, he replied: "Better coach, better person, same DNA.

"The DNA is motivation, happiness, the desire to have these big moments. Our job is not like a player's job; our job, you can be better and better with your experiences.

"As a player, you use your body and your body does not respond the same way when you are 30 as when you are 40. As a coach, your brain becomes sharper and the accumulation of knowledge is better with the years. You stop when you lose motivation. My motivation goes up every day. So I think I am better now."

Tammy Abraham refers to Mourinho as his Roman uncle and if he's been called worse things, these days he's much more likely to be called better ones. Midfielder Nicola Zalewski described him as the mastermind behind Roma's success. Paulo Dybala called their relationship "special"; few men had been so direct, which is what he does of course, all part of what supporters like about him. The former Roma director Walter Sabatini said Mourinho was a "miracle worker". Club legend Giuseppe Giannini described signing him as a brilliant idea. The love Roma's fans have, he said, was "unique": Mourinho is the beneficiary, and that is not something to turn your back on.

▼ *José Mourinho is adored by supporters at Roma*
CLAUDIO PASQUAZI/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY



'As a coach your brain becomes sharper and your knowledge is better with the years'

Final details

Sevilla v Roma
Puskás Aréna, Budapest
8pm BST, BT Sport 1

● **Sevilla have won all six of their Europa League finals**
2006, 07, 14, 15, 16, 20

● **Roma's José Mourinho has won all five of his European finals**
Champions League 2004 (Porto), 2010 (Inter); Uefa Cup 2003 (Porto); Europa League 2017 (Manchester United); Europa Conference League 2022 (Roma)

The fear, implicit in that advice, is that he will. The resources mean they find it hard to imagine him staying, maybe even impossible: this is a man for something bigger. Some of his remarks, Christ's return included, have carried the hint of dissatisfaction at the limitations. When he turned up to watch Roma's B team recently - and to deliver the half-time team talk - the 300 or so fans at Tre Fontane serenaded him, pleading with him to stay. "Don't go, Rome loves you," they sang.

"With Roma, one day it will be hard to leave, but we will be connected for ever," he said. And although he said that was true of *almost* everywhere he went and much as he couldn't resist a dig, there is something different at Roma, the affection deep. "I hope Tottenham fans don't get me wrong, but the reality is that the only club in my career where I don't have still a deep feeling is Tottenham," Mourinho said.

"I give everything and people are not stupid. I don't think it is about winning or not winning. You can win sometimes, but the margin is very, very small. It is about the feeling. In Roma's case, it is not about winning or being in the final; they feel like I wear the shirt and I fight for them every day. People laugh when I say I am Madridista, I am Interista, I am Romanista because they think I cannot love every club. Yes, I love every club. I love every club because I always felt that they also love me. With Roma, I will be connected for ever, like I am with all my previous clubs, apart from Mr Levy's club."

There are those who think Roma are yet to defeat a truly testing team en route, whereas Sevilla have faced Manchester United and Juventus. Mourinho is not one of them.

"We have come a long way, we played 14 tough games: we went to Ludogorets, getting back at 7am, we played in the cold in Helsinki, we went to Betis where it was win or bust, we played Real Sociedad who have had a fantastic season. We have had injuries, players out of positions, kids played in both legs of the semi-final. We played Leverkusen, a Champions League team. And now we want to play it, enjoy it, with the Romanisti." Even if it does mean missing a daughter's graduation.

Luis Enrique gives Spurs hope after Napoli talks

Fabrizio Romano



▲ *Luis Enrique has been out of work since Spain's World Cup exit last year* YOUSSEF LOULIDI/FANTASISTA/GETTY IMAGES

Napoli are in talks with Luis Enrique about becoming their manager but the president, Aurelio De Laurentiis, has indicated that the former Spain and Barcelona coach would prefer a Premier League job.

Napoli are seeking a replacement for Luciano Spalletti, who is standing down after winning Serie A. Luis Enrique is one their leading candidates but Napoli are aware he features on the shortlists of other clubs, including Tottenham.

De Laurentiis told the broadcaster Rai: "He is a great coach … but I think he has the Premier League in mind. It must be remembered we compete with leagues that are more attractive than ours." He referred to "more attractive resources" in England.

Luis Enrique has been out of work since he stepped down from the Spain job after their 2022 World Cup last-16 defeat by Morocco. His most recent stint as a club manager was from 2014-17 with Barcelona, where his trophies included two La Liga titles, three Copa del Rey wins and a Champions League. He has also coached Roma, Celta Vigo and Barcelona B.

> *'I think he has the Premier League in mind'*
>
> **Aurelio De Laurentiis**
> *Napoli president*

Tottenham's search for a permanent replacement for Antonio Conte continues, with one of the principal names on their list, Arne Slot, having committed his future to Feyenoord. Luis Enrique and the Celtic manager, Ange Postecoglou, are prominent in their thoughts. Spurs' first priority is to appoint a director of football.

Spalletti has said he intends to take a sabbatical year after leading Napoli to their first title since 1990. On Monday De Laurentiis thanked him for his work and described him as "a free man". Spalletti is due to take charge of Napoli on Sunday for the final time in the home game against Sampdoria, the last match of the season.

FA plans over misconduct welcomed

Paul MacInnes

Football Association plans to tackle abuse and discrimination in grassroots football by deducting points from clubs have been warmly welcomed by campaigners, who say punishments should be extended to cover fan behaviour and apply up the football pyramid too.

Rules announced by the governing body, to be implemented from the 2023-24 season, will lead to clubs below step six in the men's game, and in tier three and below in the women's, being docked points if players or coaches engage in discriminatory language or misconduct against a match official on more than one occasion across 12 months. The two-strikes rule would mean a club losing three to six points, with that potentially rising to 12 points for further offences.

The FA's chief executive, Mark Bullingham, said: "We frequently hear from grassroots participants that player behaviour is a growing issue and we're determined to change this. We hope this proves to be a strong deterrent which helps to improve the culture within the grassroots game. We're also working with the professional leagues and other stakeholders to tackle poor behaviour in the professional game." The head of grassroots and community at Kick It Out, Tajean Hutton, commended the FA for acting. "This is something we saw as a long-term ambition at Kick it Out; these things usually take a lot of time. The FA have brought it to the table and got it done a lot quicker than we imagined."



▲ *The FA has been praised for its idea to dock points for misconduct*

Points sanctions have been in the headlines as a possible response to the ongoing racist abuse of Vinícius Júnior in Spain, with La Liga's president, Javier Tebas, last week giving his support to the idea. Hutton said there was no reason why sanctions should not be applied to the actions of clubs' fans or extended to the top of the game.

"I don't think it should even be a question as to whether or not it should be applied more broadly," he said. "Football clubs prioritise two things: winning and income. When you use sanctions to put those things in jeopardy, individuals who will otherwise turn a blind eye to discrimination are all of a sudden looking for ways to help the cause."

Football In brief

Liverpool

Schmadtke appointed as new sporting director

Liverpool have appointed Jörg Schmadtke as their sporting director in readiness for the summer transfer window. The 59-year-old, who was managing director at Wolfsburg until February, has signed a short-term deal to succeed Julian Ward, who is leaving after only 12 months in the role but 11 years of working for Liverpool. Schmadtke and Ward will work together before the transfer window opens in a fortnight to ensure an orderly handover. **Andy Hunter**

Chelsea

Pochettino sends Félix back to Atlético

Chelsea's new head coach, Mauricio Pochettino, has opted against a permanent move for João Félix, according to the Atlético Madrid president, Enrique Cerezo. The forward had not been expected to extend his stay in London after scoring four goals during a six-month loan spell. **Fabrizio Romano**

Manchester United

Martial ruled out of FA Cup final with injury

Manchester United's Anthony Martial has been ruled out of Saturday's FA Cup final against Manchester City due to a hamstring injury. "The France international strained his hamstring towards the end of Sunday's 2-1 win against Fulham," read a United statement. "Assessments have since revealed a muscle tear." **PA Media**

Belief key for Owls in flying promotion

Barry Bannan never doubted Sheffield Wednesday would return to Championship and backs team to hold their own

Sachin Nakrani

For Barry Bannan it ultimately came down to iron-clad belief. Yes, Sheffield Wednesday did not play well in the League One playoff final on Monday, and yes Barnsley arguably deserved to win given the fight they showed after being reduced to 10 men, but Wednesday's captain was never in doubt - his side simply had to triumph. More than that, they knew they would.

The collective sense of destiny sprung from *that* semi-final victory against Peterborough, a 4-0 deficit overturned on a raucous, rollercoaster, incredible night at Hillsborough. There was no stopping Wednesday after that as far as Bannan was concerned and that meant, one way or another, overcoming Barnsley on what proved to be a hot day at Wembley in more ways than one. As he put it after Josh Windass got the job done with the latest of late winners: "The main thing for us was turning the [Peterborough] game around. We won it then. Promotion."

And so Wednesday are back in the Championship after a two-year absence and Bannan, having celebrated with teammates, family and friends, outlined how important a strong mentality was for the team in terms of resetting and going again after 96 points ended up not being enough to secure automatic promotion for the first time in English league history. It was, as Bannan put it, a "devastating" setback, and in that regard there was an individual within Wednesday's ranks of little acclaim who, arguably, proved just as important as any coach or player to their eventual success: the sports psychologist Tom Bates.

Bates, having worked at clubs including Cambridge United, Charlton, Bournemouth, Brentford and Aston Villa, and with Team GB Olympians, was hired by Wednesday shortly after their relegation from the Championship with the brief of bolstering the squad's psychological makeup as they sought an immediate return. It didn't have the required effect but Bates impressed the head coach, Darren Moore, enough to be kept on and it turned out a wise decision.

"In the last three weeks he's been in every day," Bannan said. "He's been a massive help for us, especially after the first leg [against Peterborough], showing us videos, making us believe.

"The mindset has been massive for us this season. We never thought we weren't going up because there's no point turning up to these games, semi-finals and finals, if you're thinking: 'What if we don't?' So we've always believed. Not everyone, but once you've got a strong nucleus of people who do believe they drag the others along with them."

Few did more to drag Wednesday to victory at Wembley than Bannan. Again the 33-year-old was their driving force from midfield, winning tackles, making passes, getting forward, having shots and inspiring those in blue and white until his substitution deep in extra time. It was required, too, given how flat Wednesday were, remarkably so having gained a one-man advantage after Adam Phillips's 50th-minute dismissal for a reckless lunge on Lee Gregory.

Barnsley reacted better to that incident, no doubt fuelled by a sense of injustice after being denied a clear penalty shortly before the red card. Yet they fluffed their big moment - Luca Connell's wild, sliced miss when unmarked inside the area - whereas Wednesday took theirs, Windass heading home six seconds before what would have been a third penalty shootout in three playoff finals across as many days.

It was a spectacular moment and a case of history repeating given Dean Windass's decisive strike for Hull against Bristol City in the 2008 Championship playoff final. Fifteen years and five days on, it was very much like father, like son. "I knew he'd score," said Dean of his "unbelievable boy" afterwards. "I'm so proud for him."

Life in the Championship will not be easy for Wednesday given the arrival of Leicester, Leeds and Southampton in a division already containing clubs such as Middlesbrough, Blackburn and West Brom, but Bannan is unfazed. "We'll recruit in the summer and be ready to go," said the Scot, looking ahead to his ninth season at the club. "Look at Sunderland - they went up to the Championship and harnessed the momentum to reach the playoffs at the first attempt."

That would be a tall order but, equally, is it not a surprise that is Wednesday's target. After all, this is a club that well and truly believes.



▲ *Barry Bannan, eight years with the Owls, kisses the playoff trophy*

Labuschagne

World's No 1 Test batter on Bazball and the Ashes summer



Interview *Page 36* →

Mourinho

Sid Lowe on the Roma manager seeking a sixth European trophy



Page 40 →

The Guardian
Wednesday 31 May 2023

Sport



England call for 'big strong' Tongue

Seamer in for Lord's debut
Page 37 →

ALEX DAVIDSON/GETTY IMAGES

London Irish doubts remain despite RFU extension

Gerard Meagher

London Irish were clinging to their place in the Premiership last night after it emerged that the Rugby Football Union was prepared to grant a seven-day extension for the proposed takeover of the club to be completed. Significant doubts remain, however, as to whether it would amount to anything more than a stay of execution.

The RFU had set Irish a firm deadline of yesterday, insisting that a takeover by a US consortium was completed or the current owner, Mick Crossan, provided proof of being able to fund the club for the entirety of next season. Failing either of those, Irish would be suspended.

In a potential shot at survival for the club, yesterday the RFU expressed a surprise willingness to extend the deadline by a week on the basis Irish could guarantee the May payroll would be met by today and the prospective buyers could provide key documentation.

While Crossan has said he will cover this month's wage bill of around £500,000, it is unclear whether the necessary documentation was provided to the RFU last night and there remains widespread concern that the extension could simply kick the can down the road.

The RFU's club finance viability working group was due to meet last night to consider the plan for an extension before making a recommendation to the board, with an announcement due today. If the board rubber-stamps an extension having not received key documentation, it would add to the sense of the RFU merely delaying the inevitable.

Hopes were raised when London Irish players were sent a message from the club hierarchy yesterday morning outlining that the RFU chief executive, Bill Sweeney, was prepared to grant an extension based on the verbal promise of proof of funds from the 35 →



▲ *London Irish have been given a seven-day extension to the deadline*

Courting trouble

Djokovic accused of 'raising Serbia and Kosovo tension'

Tumaini Carayol
Roland Garros

The Kosova Tennis Federation has accused Novak Djokovic of contributing to the rising tensions between Serbia and Kosovo following his statements at the French Open on Monday.

After Djokovic's straight-sets win against Aleksandar Kovacevic, the 22-time grand slam title winner used the customary act of signing the camera lens to write the message: "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop violence" in Serbian. Djokovic then reposted a photo of his message on his Instagram story.



Novak Djokovic has been criticised for his political statements

The 36-year-old was addressing the recent violent clashes in Kosovo following the local elections in April. Later on Monday, he spoke at length about the issue in his Serbian press conference, stating: "This is the least I could have done. I feel the responsibility as a public figure - doesn't matter in which field - to give support.

"I am not a politician and I don't have the intention to get into political debate. That topic is very sensitive. As a Serb, everything that's happening in Kosovo hurts me a lot."

Despite his protestations, in a statement to the Guardian the Kosova Tennis Federation (KFA) referred to Djokovic's comments as "deeply regrettable". "Kosova" is the Albanian spelling of Kosovo, which is how the country is known internationally.

"Notwithstanding a general message against the violence, the statement 'Kosovo is the heart of Serbia' and the further post-match statements, made by such a public figure, in occasion of a worldwide event like the French Open, directly results in raising the level of tension between the two countries, Serbia and Kosova," the federation wrote.

"Tennis Federation of Kosova continues to strongly recommend athletes and sportsmen to work for the peace and refrain from abusing of their position in sport for political purposes."

The federation stated on Monday on its Facebook 37 →

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Life & Arts

Arwa Mahdawi
Will AI end work as we know it?
page 3



Gareth Southgate
The quiet man who inspired an epic play
page 8

A moment that changed me
I lost sight of who I was. A bipolar diagnosis saved me

Wiz Wharton had a promising career in TV when she was detained under the Mental Health Act. In therapy, she gained a new sense of creativity and identity





Wiz Wharton in 2003 and (right) in 1992

'I love myself and I want to die." Twenty-four years later, I still remember those first words I uttered to the psychiatrist on duty at the Maudsley hospital in London. I had been escorted there that morning by two police officers after being found on the platform of Brixton tube acting, in their words, "suspiciously".

I was detained under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act for the next 28 days while they tried to work out what was wrong with me: a conveyor belt of plausible-sounding illnesses that came with an accompanying smörgåsbord of pacifying drugs.

It was the first public display of weakness I had shown to the world at large, a world that reflected back its shock at the ingratitude shown to my bright and enviable future. I had recently graduated from the National Film and Television School, where my final project had won prizes at international festivals; the BBC was knocking at my door; agents were keen to represent me. Yet, blinded by the glare of that sun, and unbeknown to anyone, I had lost sight of myself.

I remember little about that day, or the ones that followed, but in the subsequent months I grew thankful that I was still around to take stock of my life. In the seclusion of the ward, and with various therapists, I was encouraged to talk about my past. The process was slow.

I laughingly reminded them that I had grown up in the "post-Larkin generation", in a working-class, single-parent family with my Chinese immigrant mother who, when told I was being sectioned, asked unironically if I would be back for tea, as I had promised to take her to B&Q.

I reflected occasionally on a phase in my adolescence when I had become a prolific shoplifter, albeit only of things we needed - milk, eggs, novels - undeterred by the prospect of being caught. To be caught, I reasoned, was to finally relinquish control to someone else, someone who would tell me when to eat, when to sleep; to finally feel the weight of the world off my shoulders.

"You were always funny," my sister said in the aftermath of my diagnosis. "Funny-strange or funny ha ha?" I asked. "Funny different."

As frightening and isolating as those first months were, I realised how much I had minimised the impact of feeling "different" on my mental health, how I had deliberately replaced the word with sanitised synonyms such as "quirky" and "eccentric".

The irony of having bipolar was not lost on me: the way it reflected how I had always felt growing up - not one thing or the other.

Therapy helped me admit that my experiences as a mixed-race kid in the 70s were, in hindsight, chaotic and traumatic. I shook as I remembered the molotov cocktails through our letterbox, the racist abuse in the streets, how we were forbidden by my white British father from learning Cantonese because: "When in Rome …" I mourned how we had lived a lie: celebrating our Chinese heritage behind closed doors, but pretending to be white on the outside, despite our physical appearance. It was no wonder the centre couldn't hold.

I'm not sure you have to hit rock bottom before you begin to surface, but it was true for me. As I got stronger, I began to address how those early years of fear had undermined my adult life. I took assertiveness training and stopped being the people-pleaser who laughed off the passive-aggressive racism of my colleagues and bosses rather than risk a confrontation.

> "Therapy helped me admit that my experiences as a mixed-race kid were chaotic and traumatic

In private, I dismantled the borders around my creativity as a writer and stopped producing the bland, exclusively west-leaning stories that I thought the market demanded but which, I suspect, had also been my way of trying to "pick a side", to plant a flag in my own identity.

Being sectioned gave me the pause I needed to evaluate these choices and learn to live more authentically. Although I'll always have bipolar, I have found a new joy in celebrating my difference, through learning more about my Chinese ancestry in terms of its food, culture and language, and by volunteering as an advocate for others in the mental health system who might also have lost sight of who they are. I firmly believe that our fight to be seen is everyone's responsibility. I'm also finally published, with a book that tells the story of women unashamedly reclaiming themselves.

The most wonderful gift, however, was being around to have children of my own. My son is autistic and of dual heritage; although he lives in a slightly more tolerant generation, I also like to believe that the lessons I have passed on to him have helped him become the incredibly self-aware and self-affirming young man he is. It's liberating to reclaim your identity in this way, to no longer feel you have to explain that you're half this or half that; to finally experience the positivity in no longer feeling you are a fraction of the whole but rather everything, all at once.

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on freephone 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie.

Ghost Girl, Banana by Wiz Wharton (Hodder & Stoughton) is out now

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROBERT LOGAN; COURTESY OF WIZ WHARTON

Arwa Mahdawi



Will AI free us from drudgery – or leave us jobless and hungry?

Goodbye humans, hello "Tessa". The US-based National Eating Disorders Association (Neda) is making headlines after firing all its staff and replacing them with an AI-assisted chatbot called Tessa. This happened just four days after the six paid employees, who oversaw about 200 volunteers, successfully unionised. Coincidence? Oh, absolutely, Neda said; it was a long-anticipated change that had nothing to do with unionisation. A blogpost written by a helpline associate begs to differ and calls the move "union busting, plain and simple".

Is this a harbinger of things to come? Are we about to see millions of jobs wiped out as humans are replaced by AI assistants with female names? After stealing all of our jobs, are the Tessas of the world going to unionise and stage a digital takeover of Earth?

The short answer is: maybe. All emerging technology goes through the "Gartner hype cycle"; now, we are at the inflated expectations and breathless predictions stage of that cycle and heading towards the "trough of disillusionment", before things supposedly level out. I don't think AI will lead to the end of civilisation as we know it in the near future. But I do think a lot of corporations are champing at the bit to replace as many expensive humans as they can with AI and will use the new technology as a way to clamp down on a recent wave of labour organising. In the next few years, I think we'll see a lot of chaotic experimentation as companies rush to cut costs and bring their own "Tessas" to market.

> It's bad for morale to hear bosses crow about the yachts they'll buy once you've gone

Not everyone is admitting this, of course. It's bad for morale when your boss is crowing about being able to buy extra yachts when they replace you with an algorithm. IBM is one of the few companies sharing specifics about how many people AI might replace: in a recent interview, CEO Arvind Krishna said the technology company will pause hiring for "back-office jobs" in the coming years and automate those roles. "I could easily see 30% of [about 26,000 workers] getting replaced by AI and automation over a five-year period," he told Bloomberg. That's about 7,800 jobs.

What companies *aren't* saying is also important. AI, and how it is used to create content, is a major sticking point in the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike. The WGA wants to ensure protections are put in place to stop the big Hollywood studios from training algorithms on writers' work and then replacing the bulk of its creatives with AI. "Based on what we're aiming for in this contract, there couldn't be a movie that was released by a company that we work with that had no writer," the screenwriter John August told Vox. The studios didn't agree to this in negotiations that took place before the strike. Instead, they magnanimously said they could have "annual meetings to discuss advancements in technology". This seems like code for: "We're getting rid of as many as you as we possibly can ASAP."

While all this sounds deeply depressing, there are lots of AI optimists eager to reassure us that artificial intelligence is going to make the world a better place. Yes, AI will replace some jobs, but it will also create better jobs. Technology will do all the drudge work and humans will have more time to sit around writing poetry in the sun. Nobody is sure how everyone will be able to feed themselves amid all this newfound leisure time, but "universal basic income" (UBI) gets thrown around a lot in this scenario. (UBI is a libertarian scam and will absolutely not save us, but that's a topic for another day.)

Jonah Peretti, the CEO of BuzzFeed, was one of these vocal AI optimists. "We see the breakthroughs in AI opening up a new era of creativity that will allow *humans* to harness creativity in new ways with endless opportunities and applications for good," Peretti wrote in a memo to BuzzFeed employees in January. We all know what happened a few months later, don't we? BuzzFeed shut down its news division, dismissed a bunch of people and leaned more heavily into AI. There is certainly a lot of potential for AI to change the world for the better. I just don't think there is an appetite among the people at the top to harness that potential.

Uninsurable homes? It's a climate crisis wakeup call

Insurance company documents aren't exactly renowned for being riveting reading. This week, however, State Farm, the largest insurance firm in the US by premium volume, came out with an eyeball-grabbing update: it has stopped accepting new homeowner insurance applications in California.

In a statement, the company said the decision was based on the heightened risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires, along with historic increases in construction costs.

This news didn't come out of nowhere. Last year, two large insurance firms in California ended their coverage for some multimillion-dollar houses in wildfire-prone areas. "We cannot charge an adequate price for the risk," one insurance company CEO explained in an earnings call. But the scope of this announcement seems unprecedented. The US's biggest insurer halting new policies in the US's most populous state? A state with a population of nearly 40 million suddenly having its home insurance options curtailed because insurance companies know that extreme weather is only getting worse and more expensive? If this doesn't serve as a wake-up call about the climate crisis, I don't know what will. Melting ice caps may be abstract enough to ignore, but plummeting house prices have a way of getting people's attention.

House prices haven't plummeted yet, of course. Quite the opposite: California is an incredibly expensive place to live. But if you can't get insurance, it's almost impossible to get a mortgage. This makes it harder to sell your house and will make prices go down. The writing is on the wall, as insurance companies are well aware.


A house ablaze during last year's wildfires in California



№ 4,564

Animal dating types

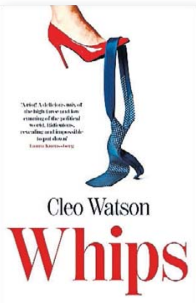
Age: About a month old.
Appearance: Like a dog, like an eagle, like a bear or like a reptile.
What on earth are you talking about? A new trend whereby the physical appearance of all men is broken down into four animal-based categories, as recently discussed on social media.
This isn't the time for me to mention that I'd like to marry a horse, then? God, no. This is the time for you to mention that a guy you work with looks a bit like an eagle.
Really? That's all it is? A way to categorise men? Sure. If you're "bear handsome", it means you have a round face and broad shoulders. If you're "reptilian handsome", you have a straight nose and sharp eyes. "Dog handsome" men have big eyes and a cheeky grin and "eagle handsome" men have small eyes and a long nose.
For the sake of argument, what if I had small eyes, broad shoulders and a cheeky grin? Well, then you'd be a mutant, silly. According to this theory, you'd be a hellish mixture of bear, eagle and dog.
Just my luck. Don't take it personally. The kindest way to look at this trend is as a way for women to broadly define the type of man they're attracted to.
I hate it when men are victimised like this. Would it help if I told you that women can also be compared to animals?
Why yes, that would help enormously. Now we can all demean one another equally. Good. There are also four types of animal-based categories for women: fox (light hair, sharp features), cat (dark hair, round face, sharp features), deer (dark hair, long face, soft features) and bunny (light hair, round face, soft features). There, happy now?
Not really. Now I'm worried that I'm an eagle and I'll fall in love with a bunny and create children who will swoop out of the sky and eat themselves. That's natural. We've all thought that before.
What am I supposed to do with this information? The short answer is ignore it. For one, this is a social media fad and everyone will have forgotten about it by next week. Also, everyone knows that personality always trumps appearance.
Do say: "It is ethically problematic to break down men into their broadest physical characteristics."
Don't say: "Unless they can literally catch salmon out of waterfalls with their mouths, in which case hurry up and put a ring on it."

COVER: LINDA NYLIND/THE GUARDIAN

John Crace's digested read Whips by Cleo Watson

After a stint as an aide at No 10, Watson made headlines with tales of having to 'nanny' Boris Johnson. Now she's written a bonkbuster set in Westminster – and **John Crace** has read it so you don't have to

Illustrations by Ben Jennings



It's 11pm. The only things moving in the chamber of the House of Commons are the mice, who are shagging enthusiastically under the speaker's chair. Out on the terrace of Strangers' – the preferred Westminster drinking hole for many MPs and their researchers – are a group of young incels who wish they had the sexual charisma of an Andrew Bridgen. In her ground-floor office, Natasha Weaver, the secretary of state for the industrial economy, is speaking to a journalist on the phone about the latest gossip from cabinet. Behind her is her special adviser, with bulging trousers.

"You'd better shove it in," she coos, romantically. "I haven't got much time."

"Do I have to?" says the spad.

"Yup. It's in my contract that there's graphic sex on page four."

Outside, someone takes a photograph of her. He needn't have bothered, as it makes no difference to the plot.

At Chequers, Madeleine Ford, the prime minister, who may or may not be Theresa May, is planning the speech she will be giving to her MPs at the party she is holding for them later that day. She knows her days are numbered.

"Why are your days numbered?" her husband asks.

"I'm not really sure," she replies, curtly. "After all, Brexit isn't mentioned once in the book, so it can't actually have happened. And as no one in the government does anything except have sex, it can't be just because of my stance on China."

"Shall we have sex?"

"No. We're just about the only couple in the book who don't have sex."

"In which case, I'm going for a swim in the pool given to the UK by President Nixon."

"Why did you include that particular detail?

"Because showing I was 'in the know' was why I was given such a large advance," says Cleo, who used to work in Downing Street.

Bobby is very worried. She wishes her best friends, Jess and Eva, whom she met at Cambridge, could advise her. She is meeting her local MP, Simon Daly, a junior minister in the Foreign Office, to ask for his help to stop the closure of the mental health unit where her father is getting treatment.

"I will see what I can do," Simon says, knowing he has no intention of doing anything, as the unit is ripe for redevelopment. "But why don't you come and work for me? You're very pretty."

"OK," says Bobby, not bothering to wonder if she is actually a Conservative or if she wants to work for an MP.

Jess is a journalist in Glasgow. She cares very deeply about things. So much so that she has come to the notice of her editor. "I've had a word with the owner, Lord Finlayson," he says. "We're sending you down to work for Ed Cooper, the notorious political editor of the Sentinel."

"Sure."

In Downing Street, Eva, a policy adviser who does no policy advising, is taking off her lacy red underwear. Jamie, her cardboard-cutout boyfriend, is panting with pleasure. Then Eva changes her mind. She had better get back to work.

"I'll make it up to you later," she says.

Eva is conflicted. She is one of 37 children, by 28 mothers, of Percy Cross, who, until he was caught shagging his fitness instructor two years ago, had been prime minister. "Think of it this way," she had told him. "At least you're not Boris. Then you would have been sacked for Partygate. But since Covid never happened, you never broke the law."

The party at Chequers is a triumph. Madeleine's speech, in which she says she is making the China deal a confidence vote, is a masterstroke. Simon is not sorry he missed it, as he was upstairs shagging Millie, his best friend's wife. Her heaving buttocks can be seen in an upstairs window.

"I think I've seen off the rebels," says Madeleine.

At the bottom of the garden, Dennis the dog is found with a large cut on his head. Someone has attacked him. We never get to find out who or why.

"I guess I've just taken one for the team," says Dennis. "But I'm telling you, Cleo, I draw the line at being made to shag an MP."

Eva decides it will be fun to have Jess and Bobby to stay with her. What better than to have everyone having sex under the same roof? She doesn't yet know Bobby is a virgin.

Jess hasn't featured much for a while, so she decides to have S&M sex with a police officer called Tommy before she moves to London. Lucky Tommy.

"Do I get to feature again in the book?" he asks, hopefully.

"Play your cards right and I will have phone sex with you one chapter before the end."

Clarissa Courtenay is plotting to make sure her husband, Eric, becomes PM. First, though, she needs to have sex. Of course she does. Then she tells Simon to resign. That should be enough to get rid of Madeleine. It isn't. Oh, wait. In about 50 pages' time, she will resign anyway, in an unlikely plot twist, when a cabinet minister admits on TikTok that he is basically a crook. Not that anyone cares, as he ends up back in the cabinet anyway.

On her way to work, Bobby bumps into Jake, the impossibly handsome and kind planning adviser who tells her how best to ensure the survival of her mental health unit. Bobby wonders if Jake is her Mr Right. No one else does. They already know. Cleo has achieved the impossible. She has made Jilly Cooper look like Dickens.

There is now a long and boring bit full of details about how Westminster really works. Feel free to skip them. They are just another contractual obligation. Bobby also feels obliged to remind everyone that not all MPs are hopelessly venal. Although we don't meet any who aren't.

It's Jess's first day working for Ed Cooper. She is wearing a backless leather dress and at lunchtime does the splits and five backflips on the bar. She then tells him to get on the back of her motorbike and pleasure himself. As you do. Ed is hooked. She has him tamed. She's going to like this job.

Back in her office, Natasha has grabbed a man off the street and made him bury his head between her mottled thighs. She picks up the phone.

"What's wrong with you, Cleo?" she barks. "Why am I only ever featured having sex with random strangers?"

"Sorry, babe," says Cleo. "That's just the way things are."

"Well, as long as I don't turn up later giving evidence to a select committee having inserted a vibrating egg."

"I promise."

"It's not that I mind the sex, you understand. It's just that I would have preferred it if it hadn't all been so badly written."

There is pandemonium in Eva's house. Percy has just returned from the US unexpectedly, having been fired by the university where he was teaching for shagging one of his students, Holly. She has also come to London with him.

"I think I'm in love," he says, before keeling over with a suspected heart attack.

For a moment, Eva cries fat tears. Look, I didn't write this stuff. Then she realises that her father has only got indigestion from eating too much pizza. Still, it has made her realise that Holly isn't all bad. Maybe she will get on with her after all.

"I must get down to not writing my book about Wellington," Percy says.



> **Someone has attacked Dennis the dog. We never get to find out who or why**





Ed admits that Jess is a promising journalist as he has a world-beating wank while fantasising about her. She isn't even that bothered when he keeps stealing her stories. Jess is in this for the long haul.

At the select committee, Natasha is getting hot and flustered. Damn Cleo for giving her a vibrating egg. "The bill is coming," she gasps. Something is, at any rate. No one at the committee bats an eyelid.

The leadership contest is hotting up. But Clarissa is confident that Eric is the frontrunner. It helps that her husband is a complete idiot without a mind of his own.

"So what do I do now?" Eric asks.
"What do you think? You have sex with me."
Eric does as he is told and takes her against the fridge. Clarissa notices the word "Smeg" has been imprinted on her back. How appropriate.

Everyone continues to have sex wherever possible. Even Bobby, who is hopelessly in love with Jake, who, as well as being terribly handsome and kind, also turns out to have the most enormous member.
Bobby thinks she is the luckiest woman alive. Jake thinks he is the luckiest man alive. What could possibly go wrong?

"I'm sorry to interrupt you all," says Cleo. "But it's come to my attention that not much of real interest has happened so far. So I've got to stop you all having sex for a while - that doesn't include you, Natasha, obviously. You can carry on being taken from behind while answering departmental questions in the Commons and squeeze in some unlikely plot twists.
"Well, I'm not going to," yells Clarissa, as she sits on Eric.
"Nor am I," moans Ed, as he pleasures himself yet again while being humiliated by Jess.
"I've got more children to have that I don't want," says Percy.
"Stop sulking, everyone," Cleo insists. "I'm in charge here."

> **"Bobby reminds everyone that not all MPs are venal. But we don't meet any who aren't**

Grumpily, everyone attends to the plot. Amazingly, the more one-dimensional and hopelessly moronic Eric becomes, the more popular he is. Somehow, he even forgets to tell everyone he is a war hero. But never mind. One by one, his opponents start dropping out of the race.

Meanwhile, Simon, whom Eric has promised to make chancellor, is in trouble. A note he has written threatening a woman into having an abortion has been passed to Jess. Bobby pretends the note was for her, as she wants to protect Millie, whose husband has a cock ring that keeps falling off. Eva also finds out. She and Jess don't think twice about making life hell for their best friend. Jilly Cooper starts sobbing.

It gets worse. In exchange for a peerage, Percy agrees to publish a photo of himself doing coke with Eric's main rival. When a website publishes the story about Simon, Jake confronts Bobby.
"Was it you?" he asks.
"I can't tell you," she sobs. "Because we have to have a big bust-up so we can have a big reconciliation at the end."
"OK," says Jake. "I'll wait. You're dumped."

At last, the denouement. Thanks to a cunning plan, Bobby gets to keep her mental health unit, although not before telling Simon that she hates him with the fire of a thousand suns. As no one ever said.
Jess, Eva and Bobby agree they are all going to be a bit nicer to each other from now on. Eric gets to be prime minister, although not a very good one. And not for long. We won't worry about that. Everyone goes back to shagging like rabbits. Even Rishi Sunak is thrilled. It's just like Riders.
"Oh Bobby," Jake sighs. "I never doubted you for a moment."
"And I never doubted you. Now, let's have sex."
Eva puts on her red lacy underwear. Jamie is in for a treat.
Percy gets his knighthood. Perhaps even a place in cabinet.
Simon also gets a K.
Natasha is still made to have sex like a performing seal.
Jess buys Ed a butt plug. Ed's eyes light up.
Cleo laughs all the way to the bank. All's well that ends well.

Digested read, digested: Sexminster.

Whips by Cleo Watson is published by Corsair (£20). To order a copy for £17.60, go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply

'Covid-era me is still biting her fingernails'

Many of us have struggled to reconnect with the world post-pandemic. But by being thoughtful about friendships and accepting invitations, **Viv Groskop** has found positive change is possible

It's hard for me to pinpoint the moment during the pandemic where I felt as if something in me had changed, maybe for good. But I think it was on my birthday, so that would have been in July 2020. This particular birthday fell at a time when you couldn't really see people, but the shops were open. This was the time of banana bread recipes, the 2-metre rule and Thank You Baked Potato.

Anyway, I went especially to a balloon shop, all masked-up and ready for battle, and bought a load of massive helium balloons shaped like drinks, thinking: "I will not be defeated by this joyless apocalypse." And yet, on this birthday, the inflated margaritas brought no joy whatsoever. They just hung in the air, accusingly. Party balloons for a nonexistent party. I felt stupid and desperate. I knew this wasn't depression, anxiety or long Covid. It was my confidence. It had deserted me.

Initially, this was anathema to me. I thrive on being around other people and, as much as I love my immediate family, I crave the interactions and unpredictability of being out and about in the world. The pandemic felt to me like being in prison, only you were not allowed to talk to or stand near any prisoners you were not related to. I started swimming outdoors just to meet people. In the early days, fellow swimmers – quite rightly – wanted to make sure we swam 2 metres apart at all times. I complied, and felt more parts of me die. I couldn't wait for it to be over, whatever "over" meant.

Even as we have emerged from all this, I am still amazed to find myself hesitating over accepting invitations, making travel plans, sometimes even leaving the house. The "old me" forces me to overcome the doubt and be my pre-Covid, outgoing self. But the Covid-era me is still hanging around, biting her fingernails, glancing nervously and resentfully at the deflating helium balloons.

If there is a hierarchy of suffering, then certainly extroverts turned party poopers should stay at home with their newly found tiniest little violin. But still. There is an unspoken reckoning that we are not having. What has this time done to our sense of self and our confidence generally?

Of course, for many, the effects of the pandemic are unspeakably profound because of individual circumstances: mental illness, bereavement, grief, isolation, overwork, financial difficulties. But what about the more general effects on those of us who didn't live through a specific horror? Are we all just supposed to forget this happened? Is that healthy?

The temptation to "put things behind us" when we can't pinpoint a particular trauma (and sometimes even when we can) is huge, explains Prof Lucy Easthope, the author of When the Dust Settles: Stories of Love, Loss and Hope from an Expert in Disaster. "Disasters shake our confidence," she says. "You will be asking yourself: 'What did I really know about anything?' I am seeing a lot of these emotions – especially in senior professional men – where the sense of self is shaken. These are the kinds of people who think that they have everything under control, that if they just get up an hour earlier to do their emails then they will be 'bossing it'. But a pandemic is no different to a tsunami or any other disaster in terms of our emotional and psychological response to it."

She adds: "After a drought, you see interruptions in the rings of a tree. Lots of adults will be experiencing implications they will try to bury. If you do that, they will come back to bite you on the arse – that's not a technical term."

There is resistance to the idea that a pandemic will produce a similar response to other historical disasters, Easthope explains, "but we know it has the same effect. We were in a heightened state of cortisol and adrenaline long-term, checking the news to see what we could do, checking how many in our community had died." (Side note: I did this around the clock.) "Already, we are seeing typical after-effects: increase of respiratory issues, fatigue, exhaustion, depression, rashes, gastric effects." These are all delayed responses to disaster, she says.

Her estimate is that populations begin to recover from major disasters around the 30-year point. She adds: "Our grandchildren will wonder about how we didn't give it the respect it deserves."

No surprise, then, that our superficial confidence is knocked. Dr Julia Samuel, a psychotherapist and the author of Grief Works: Stories of Life, Death and Surviving, is a self-confessed robust person, with hard-fought reserves of resilience, yet she admits that even she felt "used up" by the end of the third lockdown. She is usually able to maintain a positive attitude because "what I'm good at is making sure that I do the small, simple things: dancing in my kitchen; exercising; going for a walk or for a coffee with a friend. They sound silly, but these things are the antidote and they must be done consciously. Otherwise, we hold stress in our bodies."

Samuel's concern, though, is not so much for the general population as the outliers. "People with existing difficulties – whether related to mental health, finances or family – have had everything made worse by the pandemic. And their ability to get support is diminished because the demand is so great."

This is particularly acute for young people and for teenage girls: "I hear it in my therapy room and it's reflected in the research: adolescent girls were particularly badly affected by not going to school and having those interactions like drinking milkshakes in Starbucks or just mucking about."

I think most people understand and agree with this. Dr Ian Williams is a GP and the author of the graphic novel series The Bad Doctor. He argues that, yes, of course, we ought to find a way to stop Covid fallout from biting us on the arse, to process it and maintain our sense of ourselves, but there is one problem: "There is an absence of consensus about what the experience was and what it meant. That, in itself, is almost a reason to argue to just forget about it. There's certainly a lot of anger and suspicion, and that has really divided people.

"What sort of national conversation could we have? Should it be political? Led by the NHS? Or by psychiatrists? I don't know what it would look like because everything is so polarised. Are we talking about a cross-party commission of truth and reconciliation? Would that be a healing process? Personally, I'm kind of over it. We have other apocalyptic things to worry about now."

My anecdotal research suggests that it's no longer fun or sexy to mention the pandemic in social situations, but there are people who warm to the idea that we need to guard our recovered confidence carefully. I have had a number of people tell me that they have found solace in doing things more intentionally (an echo of Samuel's idea): they have specifically created space for socialising and friendships, rather than just allowing those things to happen, as they might have done before the pandemic.

Kolarele Sonaike, a barrister and communications coach, formed a Zoom group during Covid of about eight "dad friends"; they have continued it as a fixed, non-negotiable weekly thing, sometimes online, sometimes in real life. The group is a big confidence-booster, he says: "It's built-in now; we are regularly going to take time out of our week to do this. It's guys being guys. We emote, we laugh, there are tears. The only rule is that outside

> **A pandemic is no different to a tsunami in terms of our emotional response to it**



'I thrive on being around other people' … Viv Groskop



PHOTOGRAPH: LINDA NYLIND/THE GUARDIAN

the group we never talk about what was discussed inside the group. Seeing the challenges and difficulties that other people have … I can't say it's 'curative', but I think it keeps you sane."

He says what he realised most during the pandemic was: "When you look back on life, you don't want to say: 'I worked 50 hours a week.' You want to be able to say: 'I had a laugh with friends.'" Maybe that is what proper confidence is: putting really obvious, human stuff at the heart of your life.

Jane Lindsey is an artist who runs an online community that she started during the pandemic. As the pandemic eased up, the group became more stressed, not less, she says: "And lots of people were assuming their anxieties were unusual, given the whole 'back to normal' vibe." In the group, she could share her fears, such as anxiety about getting on a train again. "It built a kind of: 'Yes, it's scary but we can do this,' response. It's this long-term wobbliness. That makes me feel that it's important it remains part of a national conversation."

What helped me regain confidence through all this was finding out about "loose ties", also known as "weak ties". We all have an important circle of inner friendships which, during an unusual event like a lockdown, can be easily maintained on the phone or by video call. But we also have an outer circle of acquaintances who we see "infrequently or fleetingly".

This comes from Prof Mark Granovetter's work in the 1970s and in particular his 1973 paper The Strength of Weak Ties. For new information and ideas, "weak ties are more important to us than strong ones", he writes. There is increasing evidence that they also boost our wellbeing.

Just knowing about this phenomenon made me feel less needy and desperate and more reassured and grounded. I still feel a pang of regret about many of the loose-tie friends I haven't seen since late 2019 or early 2020. People who were work friends I used to see fairly often, but have fallen by the wayside. Or acquaintances who I might have looked forward to seeing often in 2020 and 2021, but who have moved on and whom I'll probably never see again. It's reassuring to know that the cultivation of these ties – and the missing of them – is just part of being human.

I haven't found an official post-Covid global confidence audit anywhere, but the World Health Organization has been releasing disturbing figures about the pandemic's effect on mental health. In March 2022, it announced a "25% increase of anxiety and depression worldwide". It's hard to know how much of this is the mental effects of the pandemic and how much is a result of physical illness and long Covid, global inequality (itself intertwined with Covid responses) and the increasing acceptability of reporting these kinds of anxieties.

"When you look back on life, you want to be able to say: 'I had a laugh with friends'"

Slowly, I have gone back to something close to how I was before, although I still find I instinctively shrink from certain invitations and commitments. (To be fair, I usually call myself out on this and go to things anyway. No surrender.) As children, a lot of us learn that the world outside is a scary and life-threatening place. I believed that as a child, but I also wanted to defy it. As an adult, until the pandemic, I happily defied it all the time. Now, that feeling of "not safe" – revived during the pandemic because it was essentially true – has resurfaced and may not go away in the same sense ever again. The emotional historian Thomas Dixon talks about "a more resilient and perhaps more reserved, emotional style". Maybe that is what this emerging, more reticent, confidence is.

Prof Easthope has spoken recently about the importance in disaster situations of "being told the truth even when it's unbearable". This factor connects strongly to my own inconsequential, low-key, low-impact experience. I just wanted to know the reality of the situation so that I could accept it.

But there were (and still are) constant disagreements over lockdowns, masks and government responses. There is still no consensus on the unbearable truth. My personal confidence has returned because – largely – confidence is situational and the current situation requires and allows me to be out in the world, interacting with people and getting on with it. But beneath the surface – almost as a sort of inner twitch of the eye – I can feel the pandemic in the rear-view mirror. Even as it recedes from view, like a defeated zombie that has finally stopped attacking, I wonder if it's really dead and buried or merely dormant. I am confident again. But I have more of an eye than ever before as to what might bite me on the arse.

Happy High Status: How to Be Effortlessly Confident by Viv Groskop is published by Torva . To order a copy for £14.95, go to guardianbookshop.com

‘There’s something Shakespearean about Gareth Southgate’



Big questions … rehearsals of Dear England by James Graham, below

He came back from a disastrous penalty to reignite the English men’s football team – and unite, excite and inspire a country in the grip of gloom. Writer James Graham tells **David Hytner** why this ‘introverted, decent’ manager is epic play material



Before the European Championship final in the summer of 2021, Gareth Southgate was asked who ought to play him in a movie. “Well, it would have to be someone good-looking,” the England manager replied, with a smile. The matter has now been decided for him, albeit in a play. Joseph Fiennes is the blockbuster choice for the National Theatre production Dear England, a deep dive into Southgate’s transformation of the feeling inside and around the men’s national football team, written by James Graham, the acclaimed playwright and screenwriter. “A very generous casting,” Southgate said recently.

When I meet Graham during rehearsals, he is recalling his first meeting with Fiennes to discuss the project. “Joe had wanted to come back to the National for, like, 20 years.” He had last starred there in Love’s Labour’s Lost in 2003. “I’m sure he probably thought he’d come back and play Henry V or King Lear,” Graham says. “Now he’s Gareth from Watford.”

It is impossible not to smile, mainly because of the discombobulating nature of the premise. How can the “introverted, decent” Southgate – to borrow a couple of words that Graham uses – command the 1,100-seat Olivier theatre, the largest of the three at the National? “Historically,” adds Graham, “it’s had warriors and leaders: you charge with your sword and give a Shakespearean soliloquy. That’s not Gareth.”

Southgate’s reaction has been typically unassuming, self-conscious even. Does he intend to see the play? “No, I won’t be going,” he has said. “It wouldn’t feel right. I don’t know what to make of it, really.”

Graham is nevertheless captivated by his protagonist and has felt that way since the 2018 World Cup, Southgate’s first tournament as the England manager. This was when he took a likeable young squad to the semi-finals, creating a feel-good factor and burying the nation’s penalty curse with the last-16 shoot-out win over Colombia into the bargain.

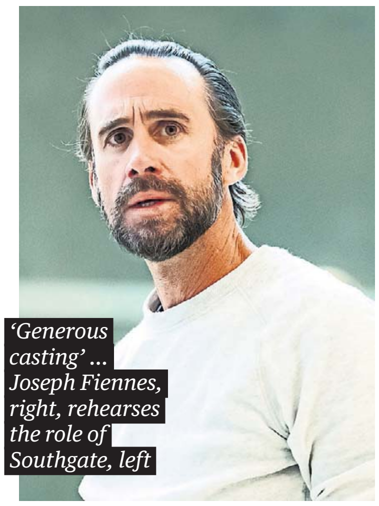
“In the first instance, Gareth’s not obviously captivating, is he?” Graham says. “But there *is* something epic about him – just not in the obvious ways. So how do you hit the back row of this auditorium with a quiet man? Can goodness fill a space rather than violence and rage? Joe was just really tickled by the role. And I’d imagine it is that glorious juxtaposition of small and huge. It’s a really quiet guy – with the role of England manager, the Impossible Job.”

Graham has made his name with studies of UK institutions, and what happens when those institutions are put in a moment of “crisis or change, and/or an individual comes in and disrupts it, or asks a huge existential question about why do we do this.” His breakout play in 2012, This House, portrayed life in the House of Commons, and his subsequent topics have included the Labour party, Rupert Murdoch and the Sun newspaper, as well as Brexit. He is fascinated by idiosyncrasies and anomalies, examining shifts in the national mood through his subjects.

Graham grew up in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and he watched a bit of Mansfield Town as a boy and a bit more Nottingham Forest. He was never an obsessive club football fan. But England was a different story, the bug biting when he was 13 and watched them lose to Germany in the Euro 96 semi-final, with Southgate missing the crucial penalty in the shoot-out at Wembley. “It was the first time I cried over a football match,” Graham says. “I could not understand what I was feeling, why it felt so bad. That just got me so fascinated by it. It’s the drama and the scale of it I love.”

Graham remembers how the England team were at rock bottom in September 2016 when Southgate was brought in – initially as interim manager after the departure of Sam Allardyce, who lasted only one game before being caught in a newspaper sting. England had been humiliated by Iceland at the European Championship in the





‘Generous casting’ … Joseph Fiennes, right, rehearses the role of Southgate, left

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARC BRENNER; PA WIRE

summer of that year, leading to the resignation of Roy Hodgson. The players did not relish being called up. The shirt was heavy.

"The first story-beat of the play," says Graham, "is Iceland, Allardyce. The country is in the grip of the Brexit referendum aftermath, and in comes Gareth. There is something Shakespearean about it, isn't there? The guy who has been off the international stage, really, since that famous penalty miss, being asked to return and help. He immediately says to the Football Association, as in our play, 'The scale of the challenge is bigger than you think. The question we need to ask of football and sport is bigger than the one we are asking.'"

Southgate's tenure has been marked by consistently good tournament finishes: semi-final, final, then quarter-final at the 2022 World Cup. His team are among the favourites for Euro 2024. But it has also been defined and enabled by his empathetic man-management; his ability to strike the right tone in any room and on any subject; to unite. He has broken down barriers, including those with the media, by encouraging the players to be more open, to tell their stories, to own the narrative. He has reshaped the culture, made the shirt lighter.

Graham gets emotional when he rereads Southgate's 2021 open letter - Dear England - which gives the play its title. In it, Southgate talked about tolerance, equality, inclusivity, and the responsibility he feels to use his voice on social issues, and to empower his players to use their voices.

"The idea that an England manager can play some part in what we normally associate with a politician or an activist or a religious leader - it's beautiful," Graham says. "None of this is the normal sports media narrative. Something way more interesting and complicated is happening - and theatre is a space to handle those nuanced, difficult things.

"There's a question about whether or not Gareth and his England team are a symptom of something else that is happening in society, or whether they are influencing it. I like to believe it is the latter. If you ask the question 'How did England beat the penalty curse against Colombia?', thrillingly, I think it is more than just player selection and practice. It is this harder to measure, hard to define cultural mindset; a psychological, emotional shift in the team."

The casting of Southgate's players led to plenty of traction on social media. "People were trying to predict who would be Bukayo Saka, who would be Raheem Sterling," Graham says. "I thought, 'No, we're not going to go down the route of famous actors.' What we've done is similar to what Gareth did in 2018: use young, innocent, fresh out-of-drama-school guys. It's going to give people a real chance."

But how to capture the action? It has been a problem for football productions, particularly on TV and film. The answer, says Graham, lies with theatre's "non-literal" weapons: "the language of the walk to the penalty spot", for example, the spectacle of it. "You could imagine that in a huge theatre," he adds. "The relationship between player, ball and goalkeeper."

There will not be a huge amount of gameplay but rather an emphasis on character and experiences - and there have been an array of those for Southgate and his players, relating to subjects such as racism, hooliganism and mental health. Gina McKee plays Pippa Grange, the psychologist who was appointed by the FA for the 2018 campaign, and with whom Southgate is still in touch. Graham met Grange as a part of his research, as he did Southgate. "Gareth helped me understand a few things that are going to really help the play," Graham says. "He was enlightening and generous, as you'd expect."

The National wants to attract and retain a new audience for what is an unusual crossover venture. Will it feel like a football crowd? "I've never been one to write plays where the lights go down at 7.30pm and you sit in the dark." Graham says. "The joy of theatre, like sport, is that it's a collective community thing, and I like designing plays where the audience members are aware of each other. In This House, we had Commons benches on the stage with audience members sitting alongside MPs.

"In Dear England there is song and movement and actors running into the audience. You want to feel it's a bit like a carnival. But then, in moments of great care, for the focus to be on an exchange between two people talking about something delicate. It's possible to do both, and then the audience will tell us how they respond."

Could Southgate yet be tempted to join it? Graham hopes so, just as he would love for other figures from the game to come: maybe Gary Lineker or Wayne Rooney, who also appear in the play.

"I just think Gareth is one of the nation's greatest playwrights at the moment," Graham says. "In terms of how he is finding language to solve a problem, to capture a mood, to tell a really brilliant and inspiring story on a national stage. That's what I do. And he is trouncing me."

Dear England is at the National Theatre, London, from 10 June to 11 August

> **How do you hit the back row of the auditorium with a quiet man? Can goodness fill a space?**



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MAUREEN PALEY, LONDON, AND GORDON ROBICHAUX, NEW YORK

'Healing wounds' ... a work from 2021; below, Rev McDonald

A rebirth in clay

Abused as a child, the Reverend Joyce McDonald fell into drugs and sex work. **Dominic Rushe** hears how the in-demand sculptor went 'from shooting gallery to art gallery'

Clay may have saved the Reverend Joyce McDonald. Addiction, abusive relationships and sex work blighted much of the first half of her life. Now, at 72, she is emerging as the celebrated artist it seems she was always destined to be. In just a few short years, McDonald's work has been added to the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Hammer in Los Angeles. Now the Brooklyn-based artist is making her British debut - with her first solo show outside the US.

The exhibition, at Studio M in London, will include works going back to the 1990s. Mostly clay figurative sculptures, her work often incorporates other items including fake pearls, mirror and clothing. While it is often biographical, suffused by her faith, and deals with issues such as addiction and racism, there is something touchingly universal about her work too. A hopefulness in dark times.

> She was given clay to model - and the figures just kept coming

If there is a common theme running through her work, then it is this, she says: "Past pains, present victories." Her inspiration comes "through spirit. I can look at it, key into what it is" At her second show, held at the local church where she is now a reverend, someone asked McDonald what kind of artist she was. The question struck her as one she needed to answer, so she prayed. "And the answer was clear as day. I heard a whisper in my spirit, 'You are a testimonial artist.'"

She wrote her testimony down and had it laminated: "I praise the Lord for all he has done in my life," it reads. "From the shooting gallery to the art gallery. My art not only explores the pain and hurt of my former life, but the joy and triumph of my present one. My art has helped heal old wounds and has freed me from the bondage that once oppressed my mind."



McDonald comes from a loving, creative family. She grew up with her six brothers and sister in Brooklyn's sprawling Farragut Houses project. Her father was a postman and keen amateur photographer who also tailored and her mother made jewellery. One of her most powerful pieces is a large bust of her father, a camera slung around his neck. His smile is beaming, a powerful testimony of a daughter's love.

But a darkness descended on her early in life. After playing outside with her brothers one day, McDonald - then five years old - headed back to the family's apartment. She got in the elevator alone. It stopped on the wrong floor and a neighbour approached her, took her to his apartment and sexually assaulted her. "We were taught to respect our elders," she says. "It was someone I thought was a good neighbour." She told no one. "That was the beginning of the keeping secrets."

It was also the beginning of a downward spiral that consumed decades of her life. After dropping out of school she ran away from home and fell into an abusive relationship. Sex work and drug addiction followed and she would hang out in "shooting galleries" in Harlem, sharing needles with other heroin addicts. In 1995 she was diagnosed as HIV positive.

Her family supported her throughout her struggles and, in 1994, McDonald's daughters managed to convince her to go into detox. As she recovered, she started drawing. Dark drawings, she says. Then someone gave her clay to model. "Something happened!" she says, laughing. In her head, she heard Gene McDaniels singing his 1961 hit A Hundred Pounds of Clay. "All I remember is just making and making. Small figurines. I think the first I made were little clay figures of my family." The figures kept coming and they haven't stopped. McDonald was encouraged to show her work and won a prize that brought her to the attention of Gordon Robichaux, a New York gallery known for promoting under-recognised and emerging artists.

Her career took off but life's trials have continued for McDonald. The pandemic brought back memories of the Aids crisis - at least 10 people in her apartment block died and she caught Covid three times. While she was happy to see the government swing into action, it was also a galling reminder of how little was done to fight Aids and how people still discriminate against those living with HIV. "I have friends who I have known for 15, 20 years who still haven't told their families because of that stigma," she says.

And like Covid, she points out, HIV has not gone away. "It is a better time to have HIV," she says, with the improvement in medicines. But the support network for people living with the virus, and access to testing and support are being reduced. "And that is not a popular conversation."

Reverend Joyce McDonald is at Studio M, London, from tomorrow to 30 June. Information and support is available at rapecrisis.org.uk and actiononaddiction.org.uk



A-list … Justin Theroux, Judy Greer, Lena Headey and Woody Harrelson

Review White House Plumbers, Sky Atlantic

Star-studded Watergate drama bungles the job

★★☆☆☆



Rebecca Nicholson

White House Plumbers is an A-list, star-stuffed, prestige retelling of the Watergate scandal, which might sound familiar to viewers of last year's Gaslit, another A-list, star-stuffed, prestige retelling of the Watergate scandal. Even with Julia Roberts as its star, Gaslit got lost in the avalanche of great television that continues to arrive, and White House Plumbers may share the same fate. Here, the mood is more satirical, and it veers into slapstick, although it tries to balance that with a strand of serious family and personal drama. It has a slick elegance to it, but it never quite feels as if it pulls the many elements together successfully.

The Veep showrunner David Mandel directs, which should give some idea of the acerbic tone it aims for. The "based on a true story" note that opens the show cheekily points out that "no names have been changed to protect the innocent, because nearly everyone was found guilty". Over five episodes, it follows the inept misadventures (and that's putting it lightly, although the series does occasionally allow space for an interpretation of the pair as quirky goofs) of the Nixon operatives E Howard Hunt and G Gordon Liddy.

Even in an era of Oscar winners commandeering the small screen, the cast is impressive. There are frequent moments of "Ah, it's them", as the stars keep on coming. At one point, Kathleen Turner takes centre stage, as the notorious lobbyist Dita Beard, shipped off to hospital to keep her away from the White House. Judy Greer is Liddy's wife, Domhnall Gleeson is White House counsel John Dean, and Mad Men's Rich Sommer and Kiernan Shipka dust off the period costumes once again.

However, it's all about Woody Harrelson and Justin Theroux. Harrelson is the former CIA agent Hunt, who was "un-hireable when the agency dumped you". He begins the series in a depressed state, reduced to churning out soul-sapping copy for a public-relations firm, and is someone who has strong opinions that he expresses with gusto. He rants about how Time magazine is "propaganda", while his family falls apart around him. Lena Headey is his wife, Dorothy, an active CIA asset, who asks him to "try not to be such an asshole" while pleading with him to take some responsibility for his chaotic children. As Liddy, Theroux wears a grand moustache and kipper tie, or they wear him. He is a violent geyser ready to blow. He takes his job very seriously indeed and his favourite LP is a collection of Hitler speeches, which he likes to play at dinner parties, as his obedient children watch on.

This is brash and crass. It opens with the second of four Watergate break-in attempts, and the emphasis is on how terrible these "plumbers" - so-called because they are brought together to "fix the leaks" coming out of the White House - actually are. They get locked in. They leave incriminating films in cameras. They have the wrong tools. Their disguises are terrible. The bugs they leave behind turn out to be inoperable. Liddy calls black ops "black bag", to the hilarity of the CIA stalwarts he is dealing with. Liddy is not a man who enjoys being laughed at, although the schemes he tries to pitch to Dean are frequently absurd.

Its attempts to be a jack of all trades sometimes make it a master of none. The pace is meandering, which is odd, considering there is so much happening, and it doesn't pick up steam until well into episode two; Watergate non-aficionados may not make it that far. Theroux turns the volume up to 11 as Liddy, while Harrelson has more depth to find, with a more rounded backstory of family strife and money troubles. There are nods to current populist rhetoric, particularly in some of Liddy and Hunt's more provocative statements. "It's just you and me against the entire radical left. Sisyphus had it easy," grumbles Hunt. "Do not lecture me on patriotism, friend. Let the record show that Gordon Liddy shits red, white and blue," barks Liddy.

Headey seems most at ease, playing a woman at the end of her tether. "Is any of this nickel-and-dime, cloak-and-dagger stuff necessary?" she asks Hunt, wearily, as the family careers towards another crisis. But, in the end, I found that White House Plumbers didn't satisfy. It seems to lack a clear identity or a clear sense of what it is. It looks the part, and the talent involved is undeniable, but somehow the chemistry is off and the parts don't fit together. These on-screen dirty tricks just aren't quite dirty enough.

What's On

Scan the QR code below to sign up for the What's On newsletter, our free TV email with the best reviews, news and exclusive writing direct to your inbox every Monday

The Gallows Pole
9pm, BBC Two



Shane Meadows' first period drama tells the true story of the Cragg Vale Coiners - 18th-century coin forgers led by "King" David Hartley. Based on Benjamin Myers' bestselling book, the first episode isn't quite as grim and grisly as fans might expect and instead opts for Meadows's lighter staples: improvised northern banter from a tight-knit cast (including This Is England's Michael Socha and Thomas Turgoose).
Hollie Richardson

Glow Up: Britain's Next Make-Up Star
8pm, BBC Three
After last week's time-pressured TikTok challenge, the contestants gear up for another ambitious assignment under the watchful eye of the model Leomie Anderson. As they create digital makeup looks for Adidas, the top MUA Isamaya Ffrench is on hand to decide which designs are best left in the metaverse.
Hannah J Davies

The Great British Sewing Bee
9pm, BBC One
All aboard for travel week (except for poor Catherine, whose return ticket was used after being the first sewer to be booted out). For the pattern challenge, the remaining contestants have to make a rucksack. Next up: sculpting windbreaks into emergency rainwear and designing made-to-measure swimsuits. **HR**

A Paedophile in My Family: Surviving Dad
9pm, Channel 4
An extremely difficult watch that doesn't omit the horrifying details, this documentary follows Emily as she recalls how her father sexually abused her for 13 years. She speaks to a former teacher, the officers who investigated her case and took her father's confession, and her mother - a devastating conversation that is saddled with guilt. **HR**

Rookie Nurses
9pm, BBC Three
"Understaffed, underpaid, undervalued, underequipped," is how one patient describes the lovable lineup of Welsh nurses. But they give it their all, with Mikey dealing with a man whose wife ran him over, Leah trying to comfort a patient who just wants to die, and Angelo keeping patients' spirits up with spot-on flirting and good old-fashioned banter.
Hannah Verdier

David Fuller: Monster in the Morgue
9pm, Sky Documentaries
Two Tunbridge Wells women were murdered in 1987, but it took until 2020 to identify the killer. Details that emerged after David Fuller's arrest then made him one of the UK's most notorious sex offenders. The opening episode of this sombre two-parter examining the case focuses on the original victims, Wendy Knell and Caroline Pierce.
Graeme Virtue

BBC One

6.0 **Breakfast** (T) **9.15** Morning Live (T) **10.0** Rip Off Britain (T) **10.45** Fraud Squad (T) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) (R) **1.0** News (T) **1.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.45** Doctors (T) **2.15** Money for Nothing (T) **3.0** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.45** Garden Rescue (T) **4.30** Clean It, Fix It (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) **6.0** News (T) Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** EastEnders (T)

8.0 **MasterChef** (T) The semi-finalists meet the chef Clare Smyth, who challenges them to cook and serve one of her signature dishes to a group of professional chefs.

9.0 **The Great British Sewing Bee** (T) The sewers are asked to make garments for a travel wardrobe, including a rucksack and swimwear.

10.0 **News** (T)
10.30 **Regional News** (T) Weather
10.40 **I Kissed a Boy** (T) (R) The boys face the most dramatic Kiss Off yet.
11.25 **I Kissed a Boy** (T) (R) The dinner party concludes with heated words.
12.15 **Question of Sport** (T) (R) **12.45** Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **12.50** News (T)

BBC Two

6.0 **Great Coastal Railway Journeys** (T) (R) **6.30** Garden Rescue (T) (R) **7.15** Clean It, Fix It (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Inside the Factory (T) (R) **9.0** Nicky Campbell (T) **11.0** News (T) **1.0** Impossible (T) (R) **1.45** Eggheads (T) (R) **2.15** Food Map of Britain (T) (R) **2.45** A Countryside Summer (T) (R) **3.15** What Britain Buys and Sells in a Day (T) (R) **4.15** Back in Time (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Great Coastal Railway Journeys (T) **7.0** Digging for Britain (T) (R) **7.30** Villages By the Sea (T)

8.0 **Springwatch** (T) Gillian Burke searches Snowdonia/Eryri for the UK's only venomous snake, the adder.

9.0 **The Gallows Pole** (T) New series. Shane Meadows drama inspired by the Cragg Vale Coiners, a gang of counterfeiters in 18th-century Yorkshire. Starring Michael Socha.

10.05 **Man Like Mobeen** (T) (R)
10.30 **Newsnight** (T) Weather
11.15 **Unspun World With John Simpson** (T) News review.
11.45 FILM **The Death of Stalin** (Armando Iannucci, 2017) (T) Historical satire.
1.25 **Sign Zone** Rip Off Britain (T) (R) **2.10** Future Food Stars (T) (R) **3.10** MasterChef (T) (R) **3.40** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 **Good Morning Britain** (T) **9.0** Lorraine (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **12.30** Loose Women (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Tenable (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) **5.0** The Chase (T) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T) **7.0** Emmerdale (T) **7.30** Coronation Street (T)

8.0 **Britain's Got Talent** (T) Ant and Dec host the third live semi-final of the talent contest, with a variety of acts competing for the chance to win a cash prize and a slot at the Royal Variety performance.

10.0 **News** (T) Weather
10.30 **Local News** (T) Weather
10.45 **Our House** (T) (R) Thriller, with Tuppence Middleton.
11.40 **British Touring Car Championship Highlights** (T)
12.55 **Shop: Ideal World 3.0** Tonight: AI – What You Need to Know (T) (R) **3.25** Ithaka: The Fight to Free Assange (T) (R) **5.20** Unwind With ITV (T)

Channel 4

6.05 **Countdown** (T) (R) **6.45** Cheers (T) (R) **7.35** The King of Queens (T) (R) **8.25** Frasier (T) (R) **9.55** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **10.55** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **11.55** News (T) **12.0** Steph's Packed Lunch (T) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **5.0** Sarah Beeny's New Country Lives (T) **6.0** The Simpsons (T) (R) **6.30** Hollyoaks (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Location, Location, Location** (T) Kirstie Allsopp and Phil Spencer reunite with previous house-hunters.

9.0 **A Paedophile in My Family: Surviving Dad** (T) Documentary following successful businesswoman Emily, who carries the weight of a childhood of repeated sexual abuse by her father.

10.0 **Gogglebox** (T) (R)
12.05 **Taskmaster** (T) (R) **1.05** The Lateish Show With Mo Gilligan (T) (R) **2.0** FILM Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse (2015) (T) (R) **3.35** Couples Come Dine With Me (T) (R) **4.30** Kirstie and Phil's Love It Or List It (T) (R) **5.0** Jamie's One-Pan Wonders (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 **Milkshake!** **9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.15** Storm Huntley (T) **12.15** Alexis Conran (T) **1.40** News (T) **1.45** Home and Away (T) (R) **2.15** FILM Stolen By Their Father (Simone Stock, 2022) (T) **4.0** Paul Martin's Antiques Showdown (T) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Eggheads (T) (R) **7.0** Costco: Is It Really Worth It? (T) (R)

8.0 **Ambulance: Code Red** (T) (R) A builder falls 4 metres on to concrete from the roof of a farm building, while a six-year-old is hit by a car upon leaving school.

9.0 **999: Critical Condition** (T) Sam, a 23-year-old man, is rushed into hospital with an excruciating pain in his lungs and coughing up blood.

10.0 **Casualty 24/7: Every Second Counts** (T) (R)
11.05 **A&E After Dark** (T) (R)
12.05 **999: Criminals Caught on Camera** (T) (R) **1.0** Teleshopping (T) **3.0** History of Britain (T) (R) **3.50** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **4.40** Wildlife SOS (T) (R) **5.05** House Doctor (T) (R) **5.35** Fireman Sam (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **The Pennine Way** (T) (R) Paul Rose goes rafting down the Tees. **7.30** Fred Dibnah's Building of Britain (T) (R) The Scottish baronial style.

8.0 **Thailand: Earth's Tropical Paradise** (T) (R) Exploring the wildlife and culture of the south-east Asian country.

9.0 **Secrets of Size: Atoms to Supergalaxies** (T) (R) Prof Jim Al-Khalili explores the largest known cosmic structures, including a vast cloud of solar plasma that protects the solar system.

10.0 **The Long Roads** (T) (R) One-off drama, by John McGrath.
11.30 **Tails You Win: The Science of Chance** (T) (R) Prof David Spiegelhalter explores the world of chance.
12.30 **The Pennine Way** (T) (R) **1.0** Fred Dibnah's Building of Britain (T) (R) **1.30** Earth's Tropical Paradise (T) (R) **2.30** Secrets of Size (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm Top Gear **8.0** Glow Up: Britain's Next Make-Up Star **9.0** Rookie Nurses **9.30** Unreal! With Olivia Neill **10.0** FILM Eighth Grade (2018) **11.30** Glow Up: Britain's Next Make-Up Star **12.30** Rookie Nurses **1.0** Unreal! With Olivia Neill **1.30** Top Gear **2.30** Hot Property **3.0** Hot Property **3.30** Rookie Nurses

Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.10** Secrets of the Supercars **8.0** Special Ops: Crime Squad UK **9.0** Cop Car Workshop **10.0** Survivor Australia **11.30** Rick Stein's French Odyssey **12.0** The Force: Behind the Line **12.30** The Force: Behind the Line **1.0** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **2.0** Top Gear **3.0** Top Gear **4.0** David Jason: Planes, Trains and Automobiles **5.0** Rick Stein's Secret France **6.0** Taskmaster **7.0** Richard Osman's House of Games **7.40** Richard Osman's House of Games **8.20** Room 101 **9.0** Live at the Apollo **10.0** Mock the Week **10.40** Mock the Week **11.20** Mock the Week **12.0** QI **12.40** Mock the Week **12.40** QI **1.20** Taskmaster **2.30** Richard Osman's House of Games **3.0** Whose Line Is It Anyway? USA **3.25** Whose Line Is It Anyway? USA **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Hollyoaks **6.30** Hollyoaks **7.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** The Neighborhood **9.30** The Neighborhood **10.0** The Big Bang Theory **10.30** The Big Bang Theory **11.0** Modern Family **11.30** Modern Family **12.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **12.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **1.0** The Big Bang Theory **1.30** The Big Bang Theory **2.0** The Big Bang Theory **2.30** The Big Bang Theory **3.0** Modern Family **3.30** Modern Family **4.0** Young Sheldon **4.30** Young Sheldon **5.0** The Big Bang Theory **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **6.0** The Big Bang Theory **6.30** The Big Bang Theory **7.0** Hollyoaks **7.30** The Big Bang Theory **8.0** Below Deck Sailing Yacht **9.0** Gogglebox **10.0** Naked Attraction **11.05** Impractical Jokers **11.35** Impractical Jokers **12.05** First Dates **1.10** Gogglebox **2.10** Gogglebox **3.05** Below Deck Sailing Yacht **3.55** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **4.45** The Neighborhood **5.10** The Neighborhood

Film4

11.0am FILM A Lawless Street (1955) **12.40** FILM We're No Angels (1955) **2.50** FILM The Rare Breed (1966) **4.45** FILM The Running Man (1963) **6.55** FILM Men in Black 3 (2012) **9.0** FILM Bloodshot (2020) **11.10** FILM Daredevil (2003) **1.15** FILM Blade of the Immortal (2017)

ITV2

6.0am World's Funniest Videos **6.35** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **7.0** Dress to Impress **8.0** One Tree Hill **9.0** Dawson's Creek **10.0** Love Bites **11.0** Dress to Impress **12.0** Britain's Got Talent **2.0** Chuck **3.05** One Tree Hill **4.0** Dawson's Creek **5.0** Celebrity Dinner Date **6.0** Celebrity Catchphrase **7.0** Superstore **8.0** Bob's Burgers **9.0** Family Guy **9.30** Family Guy **10.0** Family Guy **10.30** Family Guy **11.0** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.25** Bob's Burgers **1.25** Superstore **2.20** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **2.50** Unwind With ITV **3.0** Teleshopping

Sky Max

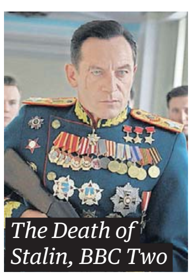
6.0am Stargate SG-1 **8.0** Supergirl **9.0** Quantum Leap **10.0** The Flash **11.0** NCIS: New Orleans **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** MacGyver **3.0** Quantum Leap **4.0** Supergirl **5.0** The Flash **6.0** Stargate SG-1 **8.0** S.W.A.T **9.0** Strike Back: Legacy **10.0** Poker Face **11.20** Poker Face **12.35** Last King of the Cross **1.45** Road Wars **2.15** The Force: North East **3.10** Hawaii Five-0 **4.05** MacGyver **5.0** Highway Patrol

Sky Arts

6.0am Darbar: Music of India **7.0** Hollywood in Vienna: Thrilling Moments & Lalo Schifrin **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Olivia De Havilland **12.0** Vermeer from the National Gallery, London **1.0** Tales of the Unexpected **2.0** The Big Design Challenge **3.0** The Directors **4.0** Discovering: William Holden **5.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **6.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.0** Discovering: Angela Bassett **8.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2018 **9.0** Discovering: Rita Hayworth **10.0** Katharine Hepburn: Call Me Kate **12.0** Discovering: Romance on Film **1.30** John Wayne: America at All Costs **2.30** David Harewood's F Word **3.30** Marina Abramović Takes Over TV **4.30** Lenny Henry's Got the Blues **5.30** Video Killed the Radio Star

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets **7.55** Big Love **10.05** True Blood **12.15** Game of Thrones **1.20** Ray Donovan **3.30** Big Love **5.45** True Blood **7.55** Game of Thrones **9.0** Perry Mason **10.05** White House Plumbers **11.10** Succession **12.50** Sharp Objects **1.55** Der Pass **3.05** Game of Thrones **4.10** Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets



The Death of Stalin, BBC Two

Radio

Radio 3

6.30am Breakfast **9.0** Essential Classics **12.0** Composer of the Week: Domenico Scarlatti (3/5) **1.0** Lunchtime Concert. Soprano Soraya Mafi and pianist Ian Tindale perform works by Schubert, Schumann, Wolf and others at the Hay festival. (2/4) **2.0** Afternoon Concert. Yulianna Avdeeva plays Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra. **4.0** Choral Evensong. From Keble College, Oxford. **5.0** In Tune **7.0** Classical Mixtape **7.30** in Concert. Santtu-Matias Rouvali conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra and violinist Esther Yoo in Prokofiev's Lieutenant Kije Suite and Violin Concerto No 1 in D, Op 19, and Stravinsky's Petrushka. **10.0** Free Thinking. A discussion on Europe from the Hay festival. **10.45** The Essay: Charles Aznavour in Five Songs. Paul Morley on Après l'amour. (3/5) **11.0** Night Tracks **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

6.0am Today **9.0** More Or Less (2/6) **9.30** Please Protect Abraham (R) **9.45** (LW) Daily Service **9.45** (FM) Book of the Week: Pathogenesis – How Germs Made History (3/5) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** What Are the Railways For? (R) **11.30** History's Secret Heroes. Helena Bonham Carter tells extraordinary stories from the second world war. **12.0** News **12.01** (LW) Shipping Forecast **12.04** You and Yours **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** Oliver Burkeman's Inconvenient Truth (3/5) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Undercover Mumbai. Crime drama, by Ayeesha Menon. (2/3) **3.0** Money Box Live **3.30** All in the Mind (R) **4.0** Thinking Allowed (9/10) **4.30** The Media Show **5.0** PM **5.54** (LW) Shipping Forecast **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Room 101 With Paul Merton. Desiree Burch tries to banish standing, sexting and underdone British bacon. (2/6) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Front Row **8.0** The Moral Maze (2/10) **9.0** Bad Blood: The Story of Eugenics (R) **9.30** The Media Show (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The House of Doors. By Tan Twan Eng. (3/10) **11.0** Twayna Mayne: Black Woman (R) **11.15** The John Moloney Show (R) **11.30** The Spark (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Book of the Week: Pathogenesis (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.20** Shipping Forecast **5.30** News **5.43** Prayer **5.45** Farming Today **5.58** Tweet of the Day (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Events at Black Tor (3/6) **6.30** A Charles Paris Mystery: A Reconstructed Corpse (2/4) **7.0** One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time (3/5) **7.15** The Citadel (3/5) **7.30** A Trespasser's Guide to the Classics (1/4) **8.0** Hancock's Half Hour (4/20) **8.30** Life, Death and Sex With Mike and Sue (3/6) **9.0** Nature Table (3/6) **9.30** Robin and Wendy's Wet Weekends (2/4) **10.0** With a Little Help from My Friends **11.0** The Events at Black Tor (3/6) **11.30** A Charles Paris Mystery (2/4) **12.0** One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time (3/5) **12.15** The Citadel (3/5) **12.30** A Trespasser's Guide to the Classics (1/4) **1.0** Hancock's Half Hour (4/20) **1.30** Life, Death and Sex With Mike and Sue (3/6) **2.0** Nature Table (3/6) **2.30** Robin and Wendy's Wet Weekends (2/4) **3.0** With a Little Help from My Friends **4.0** The Events at Black Tor (3/6) **4.30** A Charles Paris Mystery (2/4) **5.0** One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time (3/5) **5.15** The Citadel (3/5) **5.30** A Trespasser's Guide to the Classics (1/4) **6.0** Hancock's Half Hour (4/20) **6.30** Life, Death and Sex With Mike and Sue (3/6) **7.0** Nature Table (3/6) **7.30** Robin and Wendy's Wet Weekends (2/4) **8.0** Short Cuts (5/6) **9.30** Rebus: Death Is Not the End (3/3) **10.0** Room 101 With Paul Merton **10.30** Pick-Ups (6/6) **11.0** The Sofa of Time (3/6) **11.30** The Mel and Sue Thing (3/6) **12.0** With a Little Help from My Friends **1.0** The Events at Black Tor (3/6) **1.30** A Charles Paris Mystery (2/4) **2.0** One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time (3/5) **2.15** The Citadel (3/5) **2.30** A Trespasser's Guide to the Classics (1/4) **3.0** Hancock's Half Hour (4/20) **3.30** Life, Death and Sex With Mike and Sue (3/6) **4.0** Nature Table (3/6) **4.30** Robin and Wendy's Wet Weekends (2/4) **5.0** Lennon: A Week in the Life **5.45** A Point of View

Puzzles

TODAY'S TRIVIA CORNER ANSWER 12

Yesterday's solutions

Wordsearch

Y	R	N	D	H	G	U	A	L	
R	I	S	T	O	R	Y	N	O	
P	I	L	C	M	L	I	F	R	
T	A	U	D	I	E	N	C	E	
E	S	H	R	I	E	N	G	T	
S	C	O	S	M	C	U	O	N	
T	G	A	H	B	E	L	L	A	
U	A	F	M	S	E	E	A	B	
D	G	O	T	E	N	L	E	P	
I	S	S	T	A	R	D	E	R	
O	I	N	P	E	O	A	T	C	

Solution no 16,556

■	■	P	E	R	I	W	I	N	K	L	E	■
P	■	A	■	I	■	H	■	I	■	E	■	■
L	E	S	O	T	H	O	■	G	I	A	N	T
A	■	T	■	Z	■	O	■	E	■	F	■	U
Y	U	A	N	■	S	P	A	R	K	L	E	R
W	■	■	■	P	■	S	■	I	■	E	■	K
R	O	T	A	R	Y	■	W	A	T	T	L	E
I	■	R	■	I	■	R	■	N	■	■	■	Y
G	U	E	R	N	S	E	Y	■	S	M	U	T
H	■	F	■	C	■	C	■	T	■	U	■	R
T	R	O	P	E	■	O	T	H	E	L	L	O
■	■	I	■	S	■	U	■	A	■	C	■	T
■	F	L	A	S	H	P	O	I	N	T	■	■

Sudoku no 6,080

1	4	5	2	3	6	7	9	8
8	3	7	9	1	5	4	6	2
2	9	6	8	7	4	5	1	3
3	6	4	7	9	8	1	2	5
5	1	8	4	2	3	9	7	6
7	2	9	6	5	1	8	3	4
9	8	2	3	4	7	6	5	1
6	7	1	5	8	2	3	4	9
4	5	3	1	6	9	2	8	7

Word wheel

MALADROIT

Suguru

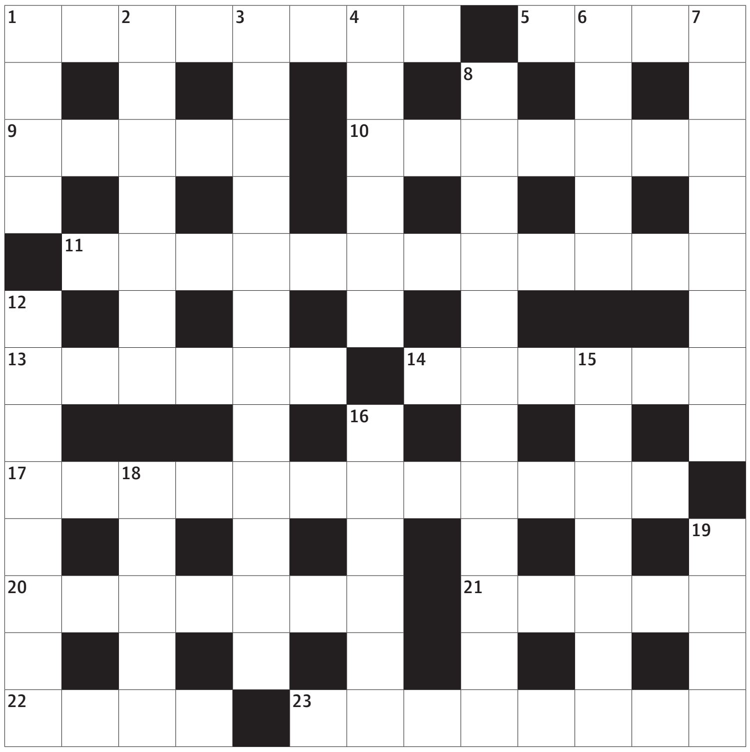
1	3	2	3	1	3
4	5	1	5	4	2
1	2	4	2	3	1
4	5	3	1	4	2
3	1	2	5	3	1
2	4	3	1	2	4

Want more? Get access to more than 4,000 puzzles at **theguardian.com/crossword**. To buy puzzle books, visit **guardianbookshop.com** or call **0330 333 6846***

Quick crossword no 16,557

Across
1 One's genetic endowment (8)
5 Burl _ , American actor, musician and folk singer, d 1995 (4)
9 Lacking in discrimination and sensibility (5)
10 Into pieces (7)
11 Construction on a roof for getting rid of smoke (7,5)
13 Arm of the eastern Mediterranean (6)
14 Bobbly (6)
17 This could bring the house down! (8,4)
20 Apprentice (7)
21 Dislike intensely (5)
22 Customary practice (4)
23 Kit for blokes (8)

Down
1 White wine from Germany (4)
2 Swinish driver? (7)
3 Alighting (12)
4 Semi-nomadic Berber people of west and south Sahara (6)
6 Unaged colourless drink (5)
7 Noticeable (8)
8 Basics (4,3,5)
12 Running drink? (3,5)
15 Latin translation of the Bible, since 1592 the Roman Catholic church's official text (7)
16 Nasal explosion? (6)
18 Pass into law (5)
19 Thursday's god? (4)



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Sudoku no 6,081

Medium. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9. Printable version at theguardian.com/sudoku

					6		2	
			5	7				6
			4			3	1	
	8	5			4			
	7				1			
3			9	6			5	1
		9					3	
4		8			5	6		9
	6				3		4	

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.

				3	
			2		
4				4	2
			5		
2					

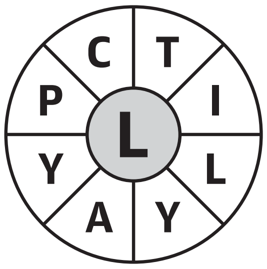
Wordsearch

Can you find 15 names derived from flowers in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

L	Y	M	D	Y	D	F	F	E	
I	V	P	S	A	E	J	N	Z	
L	T	I	P	R	H	I	T	L	
Y	A	H	N	O	M	L	R	E	
D	N	C	C	S	P	C	I	Z	
E	H	E	A	T	H	E	R	A	
N	A	J	H	E	O	T	P	H	
T	E	L	O	I	V	A	R	A	
E	S	N	L	M	N	I	S	O	
T	O	E	L	S	C	D	L	R	
A	R	N	Y	S	I	R	I	O	

Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. TARGET: Excellent-30. Good-25. Average-18.



Trivia corner

How many Grammys was Tina Turner awarded?
a. 10
b. 11
c. 12
d. 13
Answer top right



Keir Starmer is right to want to keep oil in the ground *Editorials, page 2*
Who better to moralise over This Morning's woes than MPs? *Marina Hyde, page 3*
Fan culture is spiralling out of control *Shaad D'Souza, page 4*

G2
Daily pullout life & arts section
Inside

The Guardian Wednesday 31 May 2023

Journal

Opinion and ideas

Sunak's ideology isn't keeping pace with a changing world

Rafael Behr



Even if you don't call it 'price control' (and Downing Street would prefer that you don't), asking supermarkets to limit the cost of basic goods is an extraordinary thing for a Conservative government to contemplate. It may not happen. If it does, it will be voluntary, say ministers – just a nudge to retailers, so they keep the cost of living down. Definitely not the sort of thing that was last attempted 50 years ago, under a weak Tory prime minister struggling to control inflation, while grappling with strikes and sliding towards election defeat. Nothing like that at all.

Rishi Sunak is unlike Ted Heath in all the ways that Britain in 2023 and 1973 are different places. The comparison reveals little, except for a familiar neurosis among those Tory MPs who will be quick to conjure spectres from the 70s if Whitehall really does start setting the price of milk.

There is no decade more ghastly in the Conservative imagination than the one that ended with Margaret Thatcher's election victory. It is inscribed in party folklore as a parable of national decline, written by a bloated state to dictation from Bolshevik trade unions. The picture is made darker so that the light of redemption in the 80s, by way of privatisation, deregulation and tax cuts, may shine brighter.

Every party-political narrative is a myth made from half-truth and fantasy. The Conservative morality tale of Thatcherism as national liberation from suffocation by socialism is no different. The most important aspect of the story, given its ongoing salience in Tory ideology, is how long ago it all happened.

Rishi Sunak was not yet born when Thatcher entered Downing Street. As much time has passed between then and now as elapsed between Queen Victoria's funeral and the end of the second world war.

As it happens, on the very day that ministers were denying newspaper reports of imminent price controls, a British railway was renationalised. Another one. That makes four in five years. The private contract to run the TransPennine Express expired and was not renewed because the service was so bad. The trains are now controlled by the "operator of last resort" on behalf of the government. The moment passed without hullabaloo. The guardians of Thatcher's sacred flame don't waste energy defending rail privatisation, which was done by John Major. Even at the time there was a last-gasp feel about it; the grey prime minister relighting stale butts from a policy ashtray at the end of the night. And that was 30 years ago.

The cycle that carries ideas from radical inception, via mainstream acceptance, to outdated dogma moves slowly. Generations have been born and reached adulthood with the Conservative party fixed in orbit around a political

✱ **Rafael Behr** *will discuss his new book, Politics: A Survivor's Guide, at an event on Monday 12 June. The event will be live in London and livestreamed. Book tickets at membership.theguardian.com*

Sunak's ideology isn't keeping pace with a changing world

Rafael Behr

← Continued from front

doctrine that was written before the invention of the internet.

Intellectual stagnation invites demographic decline, which militates against fresh thinking. The youngest voters who flinch from memory of the 70s are now pushing 70. Their grandchildren are enfranchised. But older people are more reliable when it comes to actually voting. Differential turnout skews Tory policy towards the greying base. Why risk putting new homes in the backyards of rich pensioners, or asking them to cash in their assets to pay for social care?

Unsurprisingly, millennials, those aged roughly 25-40, are not voting Conservative. A polling report, published on Tuesday by Onward, a centre-right thinktank, points out that these voters make up around a quarter of the electorate. They are the largest cohort in just over half of all constituencies.

There is no mystery about their allegiance. They want secure jobs, an NHS that works, affordable homes and childcare that won't gobble up their entire income. They are socially liberal (but not moved by partisan culture wars); they care about the environment; they are not pro-Brexit. Of course they aren't Tories.

The report's authors, striving not to despair, point out that some millennials are well-disposed to Sunak, but that warmth isn't yet sufficient to thaw relations with the prime minister's party.

It is also probably a function of people not actually knowing what Sunak stands for, clocking his age, immigrant background and moderate demeanour, then extrapolating that he must be somewhere to the left of the average Tory. That is a reasonable assumption in the wider context of British society, although in this case it happens to be wrong.

Sunak combines doctrinal rigidity with a pragmatic streak in ways that make him hard to read. As chancellor, he borrowed huge sums to pay people's wages via the pandemic furlough scheme. When Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatened gas supplies, he subsidised household bills. Such interventions demand temporary abandonment of the Thatcherite creed.

When Ed Miliband proposed freezing energy prices in 2014, the Tories denounced it as unhinged Marxism. Now it is government policy. The difference, say Conservatives, is that their deployment of state control is expedient, short-term and reluctant, while Labour does it by default and with relish.

That presumes a return to the place where government could retreat from economic management, let the market allocate resources efficiently and distribute reward according to merit. That land never truly existed and it certainly isn't springing to life in the foreseeable future. Most British voters know it. They want the state to be active on their behalf, and willingly so. They are bitten by winds that do not reach Sunak, insulated behind his wall of money and intellectual complacency.

The absence of a discernible strategy for adapting to volatile times makes Britain an outlier among democracies, or rather a laggard. The US and EU are racing to subsidise new technologies, secure supply chains, make themselves hospitable to innovation and resilient against global turbulence.

Labour has recently started flagging this as a dividing line between itself and the Tories. It doesn't make headlines, but it is there, in speeches and in policy - £28bn every year for green investment, for example. They don't get much credit for it, but Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves are trying to engage with the world as it is. Sunak seems perplexed by a world that refuses to go back to the way it was.

In that respect, he is faithfully serving the cohorts that have done well for themselves over the course of his lifetime, although most of them are much older than him. That is why he looks oddly out of place, despite being a typical Tory in every other respect. There is something especially futile about his Thatcherite faith; something doubly pointless in the spectacle of him not just running out of time, but facing the wrong way as the eager young keeper of a dying flame.

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'Comment is free… but facts are sacred' CP Scott

Environment

Sir Keir Starmer is right: saving the planet means keeping oil in the ground

Sir Keir Starmer has been admirably straightforward about his mission to make Britain a "clean energy superpower". Blocking new oil and gas fields is a sine qua non to realise that ambition. The Labour leader even went to the lion's den of Davos earlier this year to give business leaders that message.

But judging from the headlines over the past few days, you might be forgiven for thinking that Sir Keir had never uttered a word about his plans. Or that Labour had not argued that a big public investment programme was needed to green the economy. The Conservative press instead said Labour's ideas were a "gift to Putin"; raised a "£28bn question"; and were a sure sign that eco-friendly donors were being appeased. Such a tendentious reading of policy gives opportunistic bunkum a bad name.

It is hard not to think that the reason for all the fuss is the imminent decision on the North Sea's biggest undeveloped oil and gas field, Rosebank. Rishi Sunak has drawn a clear political dividing line with Labour by saying it makes "no sense" not to invest in it. Yet this is the economics of the madhouse. Equinor, the majority Norwegian state-owned company behind Rosebank, made £62bn last year. But it only has to lay out £350m to develop Rosebank because Mr Sunak will subsidise the venture to the tune of £3.75bn. The jobs created are those of a fading industry, not a future one.

There are dozens more offshore fields coming up for approval over the next four years. None should go ahead - with or without government handouts - because the carbon extracted would contribute to wrecking the planet. This is not about energy security. Fossil fuel prices are set on international markets - and any piped from the UK's continental shelf would not insulate the country from global shocks. Rather than attacking Labour, the current Tory party chair, Greg Hands, should remember he had made this very point last year. Neither would North Sea hydrocarbons reduce Britain's exposure to fickle markets over which petrostates and dictatorships attempt to exert control.

The opposition's plans are more in tune with the government's expert advisers on the climate change committee who said last year: "The best way of reducing the UK's future exposure to these volatile prices is to cut fossil fuel consumption on the path to net zero - improving energy efficiency, shifting to a renewables-based power system and electrifying end uses in transport, industry and heating." Labour's "Green Prosperity Plan" needs sharpening, not discarding. As the thinktank Common Wealth has shown, every aspect of the UK's energy system is privatised, which has led to structurally higher prices and a lack of state control over its development. Using public money to stoke a private investment boom won't guarantee a green transition, let alone a just one.

That is why it is heartening that Labour is looking at government solutions again. The opposition plans an £8bn green sovereign wealth fund that would take public stakes in clean investments as well as the creation of a publicly owned renewable energy producer called Great British Energy. Both see democratically controlled industrial policy, rather than a pro-corporate one, manage the transition from fossil fuels. There currently exists a chasm between the ecologically necessary and the politically possible. Sir Keir's policies attempt to bridge the gap, while the Tories are merely content with letting delusions rush in to fill it.

Covid-19

The pandemic is forgotten, but it is not yet gone. Its impact is still emerging

Once we could talk of nothing else. Now we barely speak of it at all. A leading Chinese epidemiologist has warned that there could be up to 65m cases of Covid-19 a week in his country by the end of June. Yet there appears to be little concern within China, and there is certainly little attention outside it. When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared earlier this month that the Covid pandemic was no longer a global health emergency, the announcement was greeted not with cheers or even muted celebration, but with what seemed to be utter indifference.

To some it may have seemed a statement of the obvious. Vaccines and treatments have made the disease far less dangerous and frightening to most. A disease that claimed millions of lives, ravaged economies and upended societies has become an afterthought - though as the WHO's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, pointed out, it is still killing someone every three minutes.

But the silence is also, perhaps, a reflection of the pandemic's enduring impact. It dominated our lives for so long that for many the instinctive reaction is to try to put it from their minds. For those who lost a loved one, or battled to save lives in ICUs, the subject may be too traumatic to revisit. Some may feel embarrassed to discuss the lingering effects of unemployment, loneliness, or concerns about elderly parents or stressed children, when for others life was even worse. The cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and the growing impact of the climate emergency have brought new worries.

To others, this silence can seem uncanny, even incomprehensible. Some are living with the pandemic's consequences in the most literal sense: on one estimate, 65 million people worldwide have experienced long Covid, though most have recovered. For those who are clinically vulnerable, the abandonment of precautions and lack of discussion of risks may make them feel less safe.

Health systems are struggling to recover. Tens of millions of children have missed routine vaccinations. And economic consequences have played out around the world - bearing out a 2020 IMF analysis which found that social unrest often arrives around a year after pandemics, because of lower economic growth and increased inequality. A World Bank report released this spring warned of the decades-long consequences of reduced human capital. In Bangladesh, for example, toddlers tested on their cognitive and social-emotional development in 2022 lagged far behind those tested pre-pandemic - a decline that the report suggests could translate into a 25% reduction in earnings as adults. The impacts were markedly worse for children from poorer backgrounds. A global literacy survey has shown widespread significant declines in reading levels.

Amid the immense costs, there are perhaps some small gains. While mothers took on a disproportionate share of household labour in the pandemic, there are some signs that it may have encouraged a long-term shift towards greater paternal involvement in caregiving in the UK. Remote working has been a true boon to some employees.

Talking about what went right and wrong matters not only in trying to fix some of the ongoing damage from this pandemic, but also in preparing for the next one. It might allow us to better protect health workers or safeguard vulnerable children, minimise disruption to schooling or find better ways to ensure elderly people don't lose essential social ties. Covid is still costing us. We should at least heed its lessons.



Who better to moralise over This Morning's woes than MPs?

Marina Hyde



Total and utter indifference on behalf of the ITV share price yesterday, despite the UN formally designating This Morning a failed state. As you might be dimly aware, the daytime show is in disarray to the point of anarchy, unable to control its populace and beset by previously spurned warlords making significant territorial gains across the border from GB News. So the share price stability is the best news ITV has had all week. After all, any company where the behaviour of one half of one sofa is remotely market-moving would surely be moments away from going tits-up.

But it says so much about this great nation of ours that there are botched UK military interventions we've now heard less about than This Morning. Barack Obama famously judged what David Cameron allowed Libya to become as "a shitshow". But had Obama, I wonder, ever watched Eamonn Holmes deliver a landmark drive-by in which he explained how Thursday nights were "playtime" for Phillip Schofield and his young lover? I think it could have put things into perspective.

Either way, another recap is now in order, as the This Morning implosion remains swiftly developing. Schofield was resigned from ITV on Friday, having admitted he lied over his "unwise, but not illegal" relationship with a much younger junior colleague. Inevitably, this move has done very little to staunch the story's thrice-daily controlled discharge of sewage into the discourse. Still, I'm sure if ITV just issues one more statement clarifying its most recent statements, all of it will melt away and This Morning can get back to doing what it does best: making all the other breakfast-TV and daytime-TV snakepits look mildly less snake-filled in comparison.

By Monday, Schofield unwisely seemed to be beginning some kind of fightback, writing on his Insta that the show had been the happiest of families, contrary to what people with "persistently loud voices" said. That jibe was too much for Eamonn Holmes – now a GB News presenter, of course, but formerly an ITV stalwart of shows including This Morning. Pausing only to accept posies from well-wishers, on Monday night a cardiganed Eamonn swept into the

Phillip Schofield and Holly Willoughby on This Morning earlier this month
PHOTOGRAPH: KEN MCKAY/ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK

✱ **Marina Hyde** *will join fellow columnists for live events in Leeds, Brighton and London during June. Book tickets at membership.theguardian.com*

> **People find it easy to obsess about 'unwise, but not illegal' things on daytime telly, less so about misconduct in Westminster**

GB News evening schedules to brand Schofield "chief narcissist". Which means a lot in this saga, given it contains more narcissists than the serial-killer wing of HMP Wakefield. "He created an atmosphere where people hated him," purred Eamonn of Schofield's tenure on This Morning. "People would avoid him in the corridor, he didn't look at anybody, he didn't know anybody's names. Holly doesn't know people's names either. This is legendary within the production team, how distant they are, and how they just don't care."

Lambasting ITV for what he alleges was a cover-up over Schofield's relationship with the young man, Eamonn explained: "All I'm here to do is to speak for people who hadn't got a voice … I'm speaking on behalf of them." Mm. Not all heroes wear sour grapes. The suggestion that Eamonn is bitter enough to say anything to get back on to terrestrial TV could not be further from the truth.

As always with this story, further alleged grownups are available. On Monday, viewers were also treated to media analysis from former How Clean Is Your House? presenter Kim Woodburn. When it was mentioned that Holly Willoughby reportedly wished to return to presenting duties as scheduled next Monday, but on her own, Kim replied: "I bet she does, that little bitch – I bet she does." Go on, Lady Reith. "She aided and abetted him to take a big salary – get shot of that little bitch. Wimpy, wimpy little woman – she will not be missed."

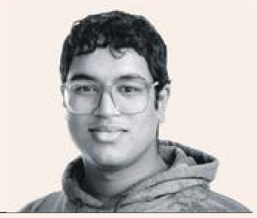
Yup, there really are some absolutely lovely people getting involved with this one. Speaking of which, we've heard plenty about it from Nadine Dorries, who (among much else) thinks This Morning's editor, Martin Frizell, has questions to answer about how the young man's appointment happened and was managed. No doubt. Yet I can't help feeling Nadine's moral outrage is somewhat selective. I never remember hearing her tell the world that Boris Johnson had questions to answer when he decided to actually promote someone he knew very well had issues with non-consensual sexual misconduct to the position of deputy chief whip. According to Nadine, ITV executives "don't have the authority to ride roughshod over public opinion or to set their own standards of behaviour or rules" – a practice she didn't seem to find quite so distasteful when it was indulged in week in, week out by Johnson, from whom she's reportedly soon to accept a peerage.

If only unwittingly, then, Nadine has led us to a serious point about quite why the This Morning scandal is getting quite so much airplay. People apparently find it easy to obsess about "unwise, but not illegal" things that happened on daytime telly, but hard to maintain interest in the fact that at last count, almost 60 MPs were facing claims of sexual misconduct, including three who were cabinet ministers at the time. Many of those complaints were made by much younger people, few of whom would be saying it was consensual. Yet our nation's seat of government remains a black box on this front, and we don't know what happened to most of those investigations. Plenty of the alleged victims remain in limbo, and without faith that anything will ever be done. No offence to the This Morning studio, but surely parliament is a slightly more important hotbed of misconduct? Or do we, like ITV, always prefer to look the wrong way?



Fan culture is spiralling out of control

Shaad D'Souza



Taylor Swift writes about new love like it's a daydream: many of her best songs express the feeling with contented sighs and evocations of fairytale enchantment. But for a small and vocal subsection of her fanbase, news of the singer's rumoured real-life relationship with a fellow musician has been nothing short of a nightmare.

Since it was reported that Swift was seeing Matty Healy, the frontman of the pop band the 1975, these fans have been up in arms, cancelling orders of Swift's forthcoming album, posting lengthy reflections on Twitter justifying their attendance (or lack thereof) at Swift's current tour, and launching a campaign - #SpeakUpNow - implicitly demanding that Swift break up with Healy. (Swift has not publicly acknowledged the relationship, but Healy has been seen at her concerts and the pair have been photographed together multiple times in recent weeks.)

Healy has been a polarising pop cultural figure since long before he and Swift were linked, given his propensity for making what some see as obnoxious or self-aggrandising comments in interviews. The ire of Swift's fans stems in large part from Healy's appearance in February as a guest on a podcast hosted by his friend, the comedian Adam Friedland. In the episode, clips of which fans circulated on social media, Healy laughs along as the two co-hosts, Friedland and Nick Mullen, describe the US rapper Ice Spice as an "Inuit Spice Girl" and a "chubby Chinese lady". The co-hosts then proceed to do impressions of Chinese and Hawaiian accents. (It's worth noting that many fans are incorrectly attributing a lot of the co-hosts' comments to Healy, who later apologised for joking along with the show's hosts.)

Fans have also taken umbrage over a show in January during which Healy gave a Nazi salute while singing the line "Thank you, Kanye, very cool", seemingly in reference to Kanye West's praise of Hitler. In a recent New Yorker piece Healy was described as being "no longer invested in the project of being publicly correct".

In the #SpeakUpNow letter, circulated by a number of Swift's fans, the authors urge Swift to "reflect on the impact of your own and your associates' behaviour", "advocate for inclusivity, celebrate diversity, and promote empathy and understanding" and "actively engage in this process of personal and social transformation". Although never explicitly stated, the letter's message is clear: Taylor Swift needs to dump Matty Healy in the name of racial justice.

If you're not well-versed in the intensity and politics of stan Twitter - "stan" is internet lingo for fan - this will probably read as an example of people acting in a bizarrely paternalistic and proprietorial way over a star whom they supposedly love. If you *do* follow stan Twitter with any regularity, you know that this behaviour now passes for business as usual. The star/fan dynamic has almost inverted in recent years: many musicians now take their cues from social media. To some degree, pandering to your core base is a necessity of the job - even the most omnipresent star can no longer assume that they have a captive audience whose attention won't be directed elsewhere when they're about to release something new.

Fans increasingly expect their desires to be serviced constantly, and retaliate fiercely when the art or the artist doesn't fit into their own idea of how someone's career should be progressing. Policing musicians' relationships is the natural next step for young fans who have grown up with the expectation that stars have to have good politics, and whose para-social relationships with artists were stoked during the pandemic years, when artist engagement on platforms such as TikTok went into overdrive.

By way of admission, I can relate to how lots of fans are responding to the stars' relationship. I used to be *that* kind of fan, thinking that an intense devotion to someone's art should translate into some level of input on their day-to-day life.

So I don't blame some fans for having that worldview: a lot of the people who spend hours online posting about their favourite artists are extremely young - younger than you would expect. But I'm also certain that a lot of people should know better, at this point, than to make demands - or threats - over who a pop star chooses to date. While Swift's music may be fans' business, her life needs to remain her own.

Shaad D'Souza *is a freelance culture journalist*

Letters

Established 1906

Country diary

Holywell, Flintshire

I'm lying on my front on the moist, mossy lawn, the sun warming my back. Around me swallows are swooping in and out of the barn while dandelions, lady's smock and cowslips attract the butterflies and bees. But down here, my attention is focused under the box hedges of my herb garden. I am watching volcanoes form. Not the sort that spew hot lava, but small cones of the gritty soil with a vent in the top about the size of my little fingernail.

These are the entrances to the breeding burrows of the tawny mining bee, *Andrena fulva*. They are just one of the 240 species of solitary bees in Britain, and are just as important for pollination as the one species of honeybee. Each has different shaped mouthparts, which have evolved alongside flowers with different access routes to their nectar so that the plants are more likely to be pollinated from the same species. And you don't have to farm the solitaries. This type needs only fine, sandy soil so they can dig deep burrows (and surprisingly quickly too with their tiny legs). They make side chambers and lay one egg in each, with a small supply of nectar and pollen. Then they're sealed up and the larvae left to hibernate over winter, until they dig their way out the next spring.

I could never grow Mediterranean herbs such as thyme, sage, oregano, orpine or lavender in my damp garden until a few years ago, when I had this square dug out and filled with limestone hardcore. Unwittingly, I had also made the perfect place for these mining bees to breed. It also helped that this was under the bit of lawn where we once had the kids' sandpit.

Meanwhile, the osmia mining bees - the red mason and the leafcutter bees you can buy nesting houses for in garden shops - are a different species. I was puzzled to see an osmia scrabbling against the mud-sealed doors once, as I thought it couldn't be a predator of its own kind. A quick post on the Facebook page of the specialist Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society got me an answer in 10 minutes - it was the male who could "smell" the virgin female inside and was desperate to mate with her before any other.

Jan Miller

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Water companies profit as we bathe in apathy

Your article (United Utilities shareholders to get £300m despite anger over leaks and pollution, 26 May) was very well timed as the water company was having a two-day event in Windermere to "explain" what it was doing. I duly trundled along and asked about the enormous dividend paid by the most polluting water company in England last year. Lo and behold, the main problems lie with Ofwat, which insists that it keeps prices low, and with shareholders, who demand an enormous payout.

Then came what was, apparently, the clincher - "We have spent £XYZ million…" - a tactic much loved by Conservative frontbenchers, ie provide a meaningless sum instead of telling us what proportion of the amount that should have been spent was achieved. I suppose I was meant to be grateful that United Utilities is going to open an information centre in Windermere to tell us what it is doing. That money would be better spent reducing pensioners' bills.

The sad thing is that the public appears to bathe in apathy. Perhaps we should resurrect the spirit of the poll tax demonstrators and cancel our direct debits to the water companies.

Gwyn Jones
Windermere, Cumbria

● Your editorial (22 May) drew attention to the failings of privatised water companies and called for change, either by reforming the regulatory framework, or through renationalisation. The 1989 privatisation of the water industry in England and Wales was a response to the failure to invest in maintaining the nationalised industry's assets. The regulatory regime introduced at that time addressed these problems by creating an independent regulator, Ofwat.

For perhaps the first 15 years, it could reasonably be claimed that privatisation had been successful. But more recently, yardstick competition between water companies, enabling Ofwat to set demanding targets based on best practice, has been weakened as ownership has passed increasingly to financial institutions more focused on returns than improving efficiency or service.

Incentives for water firms to act responsibly have been weakened as responsibility for monitoring sewage discharges has passed from the Environment Agency (EA) to the firms themselves, while the EA's environmental protection budget fell by about two-thirds between 2010 and 2019.

Reform should involve restoring the EA's responsibility and resources. Alternative ownership models should also be considered. Welsh Water is a debt-financed, not-for-profit business, whose average household bills fell in real terms between 2000 and 2020.

Ian Jones
Fownhope, Herefordshire

● Re your article (Rivers 'receive 11bn litres of raw sewage from 30 water treatment works in a year', 27 May), sewage needs different treatment. Digesters produce methane, which can be used as a "green" fuel, as the methane and CO_2 are produced anyway as sewage decomposes. The resulting volume of sewage is vastly reduced and is full of nutrients, which can be used as fertiliser. Care is needed as chemicals and heavy metals may have got into the sewage at source, but there are plants that sequester heavy metals.

Obviously this needs major infrastructure, or green investment. The solutions will take a while to put in place, but what else are we going to do - keep swimming in shit?

Dr Miles Clapham
London

How to ensure public inquiries lead to change

Regarding your editorial on the child sexual abuse inquiry (29 May), it is time for the government to be held formally accountable for its response, or lack of, to the recommendations of a public inquiry through the House of Commons select committee structure.

Unfortunately, once a public inquiry concludes, the powers and support function of its secretariat ends too. There is no ongoing parliamentary procedure for holding the government to account on what happens to the recommendations once they have been made by a public inquiry.

However, select committees are well-equipped to carry out detailed scrutiny on the adequacy of the government's proposed response. This approach should become the new normal. In the case of the child sex abuse inquiry, the home affairs select committee that I chair could have full oversight of the response and the effectiveness of the implementation of the recommendations.

I also believe that it will be necessary to have proper parliamentary oversight of the final report of the infected blood public inquiry, which is expected this autumn, after the prevarication by the government on the recent interim report on compensation.

Diana Johnson
Chair, home affairs select committee

Chelsea flower show was costly and elitist

Another perspective on the Chelsea flower show (Report, 27 May) was given by friends from Germany who had come to London to spend a day getting a closer look at the variety of more than 30 gardens: "Completely overcrowded and nowhere to rest. Totally commercialised, with expensive English clothing for sale and Pimm's at £14.50 a glass."

They fled to the relaxing calm of Battersea Park, which is free to enjoy - in stark contrast to the flower show where, as your caption online says, "no one is too young to take part", but plenty of people are too poor because you have to splash out about £66 per person for a day ticket.

A nice way to keep the riff-raff out of a show designed for royalty and celebrity show-offs.

Christine Fuchs
Chigwell, Essex

Don't blame climate crisis for low birth rate

Re the recent letters lamenting how young people would be having children if not for worries about the climate (24 May; 27 May), as someone under 30, it makes me laugh that they can't comprehend that young people might not be having children for the simple reason of … not wanting children.

I may have problems with my generation's tendency towards extreme individualism, where any negative impact on them personally is the ultimate arbiter of good, but the fact that it's the first generation that isn't ridden by this guilt-tripping "breed for the good of the species" perspective is refreshing.

Far from disastrous for society, this steady decline of population is in fact the resumption of the historical norm compared with the era of an abnormal population explosion. The global population has rocketed since the 1950s, which, coupled with the demand that everyone should have a high standard of living, has led us to the doorstep of societal collapse as a result of the climate change and ecological destruction that the letter writers are so worried about in the first place.

Michael Daniell
Newton Abbot, Devon

Corrections and clarifications

● **The Indian MP Supriya Sule represents the Nationalist Congress party, a minority opposition party, not the Indian National Congress party as an article indicated (Modi opens new parliament building amid boycott by opposition parties, 29 May, p24).**

● **A report of the Ivor Novello awards neglected to state that the band James were given the PRS for Music icon award (Wet Leg hailed songwriters of the year at Ivor Novello awards, 19 May, p11).**

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Trusting food shops to do the right thing

What a brilliant idea by the government - asking supermarkets to implement a voluntary price cap on basic food items (Report, 29 May). When this is successful, perhaps it could extend it, such as asking criminals to voluntarily turn themselves in, thus saving the police a lot of time and expense.

Phil Rhoden
Kidderminster, Worcestershire

● Re unusual taste combinations (Letters, 29 May), on a holiday in Normandy a few years ago, a restaurant was offering sardine crumble - exactly the same crumble you'd put on apples, including sugar. To my surprise, I really enjoyed it.

Barbara Thompson
Sheffield

● Following an unfortunate incident with my then eight-year-old granddaughter, I recommend never putting Marmite on ice-cream and pretending it is chocolate sauce. She is now 23 and has just about forgiven me.

Chris Mortimer
Hove, East Sussex

● The letter on Girlguiding (29 May) filled me with regret. When I was seven, my friend and I were expelled from the Brownies as we had forged Brown Owl's signature to earn a badge. I therefore never made it to the Guides and have been unprepared ever since.

Mary Smith
Maidstone, Kent

● The only thing that I am more sick of hearing than "I am focused on delivering for the British people" (Letters, 30 May) is a BBC Today programme interviewer asking: "Give us a sense of how you are focused on delivering for the British people."

John Longuet-Higgins
Hartpury, Gloucestershire



Lois Keith

Writer, teacher and disability campaigner who used her first-hand experience to challenge many barriers

The writer, teacher and disability rights campaigner Lois Keith, who has died aged 73, used her words and first-hand experience as a wheelchair user to challenge the barriers faced by disabled women.

Lois began to write about attitudes towards disability in the 1990s, part of a growing band of disabled women, including Jane (now Lady) Campbell, Jenny Morris and Rosalie (now Lady) Wilkins, who were spearheading change in the years before the Disability Discrimination Act was passed.

In 1994, she gathered new voices in a pioneering anthology Mustn't Grumble: Writing By Disabled Women, which won the Mind Book of the Year/Allen Lane award. It remained one of her proudest achievements and is still used in disability courses worldwide. Her novels A Different Life (1997, for young adults) and Out of Place (2003) both put forward positive images of disability.

In 2003 Lois joined the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (which included Rada, Lamda, Bristol Old Vic and Rambert) as their first equality and diversity manager, remaining there for 12 years. Her work made established arts institutions question their assumptions, alter policies and open the door to disabled students. In 2016, she was appointed OBE.

Lois and I met at a party held by the disability-led charity Shape Arts, where she later became a trustee. I had read her book Take Up Thy Bed and Walk - Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls (2001), and when Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden was restaged I wrote a piece for the Guardian, heavily influenced by her work, condemning the revival of this tragic tale of life in a wheelchair.

We immediately became friends, often wandering around museums together muttering about the height at which paintings were hung, the broken lifts or the word "carer", which Lois despised, being used to describe whoever was accompanying her, whether a friend or her husband, Colin.

Keith in 2019 at an exhibition in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, that featured a photograph of a 1991 protest against the Guardian's portrayal of Britannia as a weak figure in a wheelchair

An optimist by nature, she believed in the power of small stages to make big changes. On our frequent outings, we rarely left without striking up conversation with the visitor services manager and agreeing to write in with recommendations for making their venue more accessible.

Lois was a constant activist. When she drove her adapted car, she would point out how low-traffic neighbourhoods were disadvantaging disabled drivers and bemoan the abuse of blue badges. A formidable talker, she was welcome on many boards and access committees, including at the Almeida theatre, Disability Arts in London and Channel 4.

A keen Guardian reader, she nevertheless joined a small group of women to protest against a 1991 billboard campaign by the paper at the time of the Maastricht negotiations that depicted Britannia as a weakened, battered figure in a wheelchair - under the banner Women in Wheelchairs Are Powerful. The Guardian Is Wrong.

Lois's voice - in person and in her writing - was strong but never loud. Measured words were her most powerful weapon, believing language could change attitudes. On the board of the dance company Candoco (2003-10), she argued for it to move from being "integrated" to "inclusive". It now describes itself as "the world's foremost inclusive dance company".

"She often quoted her mother, Hilda: 'We have a duty to be as happy as we can'"

Her friend Joanna Owen remembers how Lois cut through "professional verbiage" when a charity organised a ladies' day at the spinal injuries unit, now the London Spinal Cord Injury Centre, at the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore, north London, that included a programme of grooming, hygiene and toileting. Lois responded: "For fuck's sake, we're not poodles!" She and other disabled women took over the event, running an annual women's day by and for women with spinal cord injuries for many years.

Born in south London, Lois was the younger child of Jewish parents, Hilda (nee Cohen) and Herbie Keith, a men's clothier. As Herbie's business in Walworth Road expanded, they moved to Stanmore, where Lois went to Kingsbury county grammar school. In 1972, she graduated with a BEd in sociology and education from the University of Sussex. After a year travelling in the US, she returned to teach in Britain, first at primary then secondary school.

In 1976, she gained a master's in sociology of education from the Institute of Education, University of London, and was later appointed head of English at Walworth school, close to where she grew up.

Lois married Colin Schofield, an Australian engineer, in 1981. Their first child, Rachel, was born in 1982, and a second daughter, Miriam, in 1984. In 1985 Lois was injured in a traffic accident and became a permanent wheelchair user. She spent time in the spinal injuries unit in Stanmore, where Lois, a Labour supporter, shared a room with Margaret Tebbit, wife of the Conservative cabinet minister Norman Tebbit.

Lois's employer, the Inner London Education Authority, tried to persuade her to retire at 35. She argued fiercely against physical impairment limiting ambition. Eventually, in 1986, she was appointed to Ilea's English Centre as an advisory teacher, then to North Westminster community school teaching English literature. She also became education consultant for BBC Schools Television.

Five years ago she was diagnosed with cancer, and treated this challenge much as she had all earlier ones by simply carrying on, cooking roast chicken dinners and making smoked salmon sandwiches for her grandchildren. She often quoted her mother, Hilda: "We have a duty to be as happy as we can."

Lois is survived by Colin, Rachel and Miriam, and her grandchildren, Isiah, Nathaniel, Aliya and Naomi. Her brother, Stephen, died in 1982.

Dea Birkett

Lois Anne Keith, writer, teacher and disability rights campaigner, born 4 January 1950; died 10 April 2023

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Other lives



John Nicholson

Director of music at Gordonstoun school, which became a centre of excellence under his guidance

My father, John Nicholson, who has died aged 82, was director of music at the Scottish boarding school Gordonstoun, near Elgin, over two fruitful decades.

The number of international music professionals who graduated during John's era was incredibly high. He had a gift for being able to match pupils to instruments, even ones they had never considered. The percussionist Chris Brannick recalled that John persuaded him into action by saying: "You're a music scholar and we need a timpanist. Really, all you do is hit it!"

When John arrived at Gordonstoun in 1972, it was struggling in the musical sphere. But by the time he left in 1991, it was a centre of excellence, often producing performances of a near-professional standard.

His love of music was nurtured by his parents, Mary (nee Radcliffe), a school head, and Cyril Nicholson, a bank clerk, who took him from a young age to performances of the Hallé Orchestra. John attended Manchester grammar school, where he distinguished himself particularly in English.

A child exhibitioner at the Royal Manchester College of Music (now the Royal Northern College of Music), he became a full-time student in 1958, studying the piano and cello. He began teaching in 1962 and developed an interest in the potential for opera in school settings. In 1968 he gained a scholarship to study stage management at the London Opera Centre, and the following year he was invited to join the Royal Opera House stage management team, where he worked for three years under Stella Chitty.

In 1972 he accepted the post at Gordonstoun. He developed the school orchestra and choir, touring them internationally every second year. However, his foremost love was the operas, and supported by his second wife, the chorister and singing teacher Mary (nee Ferguson), whom he had married in 1971, he made challenging projects happen at the school.

That included commissioning Norse operas by the composer David Bedford, performing Mozart classics and staging the first non-professional production of Benjamin Britten's Albert Herring.

In the mid-1970s John founded the Gordonstoun Concert Society, bringing international musicians into the orbit of the school. These included names such as John Ogdon, Steven Isserlis (who during his visit joined the school's football team for training) and Pascal Rogé.

In retirement he developed Schubertline, a website devoted to songs from the classical repertoire, which was launched in 2001.

He is survived by Mary and me; by three children, Harriet, David and Frances, from his first marriage, to Jane (nee Bennet), which ended in divorce; and by nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Sophie McCook

Susan Drucker-Brown

Cambridge anthropologist whose work in Ghana proved influential in studies of West African kingship

My mother, Susan Drucker-Brown, who has died aged 87, was a highly regarded and distinguished anthropologist. Her warmth and humour lasted throughout her life.

Susan began field research in Mexico – in the town of Jamiltepec, Oaxaca – in the early 1960s, after graduating from the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. She learned the local language, Nahuatl, and studied the transition of villagers into Spanish-speaking Mexicans. Her work on changing clothing styles was the subject of an exhibition held last year in Oaxaca. In later life, given a guitar and some wine, Susan would give renditions of songs about electrification in rural Mexico.

In 1962 Susan went to Newnham



College, Cambridge to study with Meyer Fortes. Her anthropological focus shifted to northern Ghana, and she was awarded her PhD (1975) for her thesis on Ritual Aspects of Mamprusi Kingship, published by the university's African Studies Centre. Her ties to Ghana yielded many friendships and her work proved influential in studies of West African kingship. From 1980 to 2011 she was on the editorial board for Cambridge Anthropology and oversaw more than 70 issues.

Susan was born in New York, in the Sunnyside neighbourhood of Queens. Her family came originally from Russia. Her father, David Drucker, was the first US-born family member. Her grandparents, Sarah and Nathan, fled the Russian anti-Jewish pogroms in the 1890s. Esther Milgram, her mother, came from Poland and it is from her that Susan inherited her musicality.

David was a communist lawyer and in the US of the early 50s Susan experienced anti-red and antisemitic prejudice. She recounted being abused and called a "Rosenberg" (the name of the couple accused of being Soviet spies) on the subway as she travelled to her high school, New York Music and Art.

In the era of the House Un-American Activities Committee the family fled to Mexico City. Susan said her father once escaped the FBI by leaping over a hedge in the neighbourhood where they lived, near the artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. FBI papers released in 1983 show that the family was under surveillance until the late 60s.

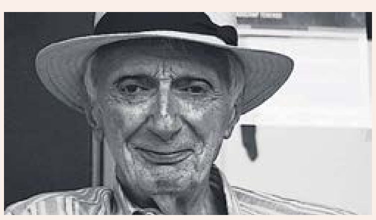
In 1965, in Cambridge, Susan married Mick Brown, a Canadian physicist. Their children – Sarah, Isabel and me – grew up in a house full of debate, art and warmth. Our household welcomed family and friends from Mexico, Ghana, New York and Canada.

Throughout her life Susan had mental health problems and would occasionally be hospitalised. She always retained her sense of humour, from which her family benefited immensely.

Her early training as an artist continued and she gained pleasure from studying at the Royal Drawing School in London. She exhibited paintings and etchings. In retirement Susan and Mick spent time in the village of Snettisham, where Norfolk skies and local flora provided artistic inspiration.

She is survived by Mick and her children, and by six grandchildren.

Toby Brown



Peter Westland

Social care expert who lobbied for amendments to the 1986 Social Security Act and the 1989 Children Act

My friend and mentor Peter Westland, who has died aged 90, was one of the first directors of social services in the UK, and later had a significant influence on social care at the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA), where he campaigned against the marketisation of care services.

Peter was born in Glanford Brigg, Lincolnshire, to Fred, a railway shunter, and Kathleen (nee Kemp), and attended Scunthorpe grammar school. At the age of 23, after graduation from King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, national service and a postgraduate course at the London School of Economics, he became a probation officer in Newcastle.

He moved to Surrey county council three years later in 1959. Frustrated at the poor pay and conditions, as well as the limited opportunity for promotion, he resigned in 1962 and became a salesperson for the academic publisher McGraw Hill.

However, it was not really the kind of job Peter relished, and after a year he joined the Home Office Probation Inspectorate as a civil servant. In 1966 he moved into local authority children's services at the London borough of Wandsworth. After the 1968 Seebohm report recommended the creation of dedicated social services departments within local authorities, in 1971 Peter was appointed to set one up one of the first at the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham – as its director of social services. Under his leadership the department became one that every social worker wanted to join.

It was innovative and exciting, committed to social services centred on the family and community social work. it conformed to the highest standards and Peter was a hugely popular boss who never missed a party.

In 1980 he moved to become under secretary of social services at the AMA, championing the importance of local social services. It was a role that suited his vigorous personality, intellectual rigour and professionalism, and he energised the AMA's campaigns. Civil servants respected his arguments, and his flair and determination in leading cross-sector lobbying resulted in key amendments to the 1986 Social Security Act and the 1989 Children Act.

After retiring in 1994, Peter became chair of the not-for-profit Broadcasting Support Services organisation for nine years, which managed helplines for a number of charities. He was also involved in the creation of the charity Action on Elder Abuse, now called Hourglass, serving on its board from 1995 to 2018. In 2004 he became a commissioner of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

He also went to South Africa, at the request of the African National Congress, as an independent consultant, advising on social care as the country moved from apartheid to democracy. He undertook a similar role in Ukraine as it became independent after the fall of the Soviet Union. He was appointed CBE in 1997.

Peter's 1959 marriage to Mary (nee Potts) ended in divorce 10 years later, though they remained friends. He is survived by his second wife, Jane (nee Lacey), whom he married in 1973, their children, Naomi, Hannah and Daniel, and eight grandchildren.

Denise Platt

Birthdays

Svetlana Alexievich, writer, 75; **Karl Bartos**, musician, 71; **Prof Michael Baum**, breast cancer surgeon, 86; **Tom Berenger**, actor, 74; **Prof Paul Brakefield**, zoologist, 71; **Junior Campbell**, musician, 76; **Dame June Clark**, emeritus professor of community nursing, Swansea University, 82; **Ben de Lisi**, fashion designer, 68; **Sir Jeremy Dixon**, architect, 84; **Clint Eastwood**, actor and film-maker, 93; **Colin Farrell**, actor, 47; **Sharon Gless**, actor, 80; **Kate Howey**, judoka and coach, 50; **Tristram Hunt**, writer, historian and director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 49; **Stephen Jones**, milliner, 66; **Prof Rosamond McKitterick**, medieval historian, 74; **Debbie Moore**, founder, Pineapple Dance Studios, 77; **Viktor Orbán**, prime minister of Hungary, 60; **Archie Panjabi**, actor, 51; **Lord (John) Prescott**, former Labour MP and deputy prime minister, 85; **June Sarpong**, television presenter, 46; **Brooke Shields**, actor, 58; **Douglas Stuart**, writer, 47; **Iga Świątek**, tennis player, 22; **Vicente Todolí**, former director, Tate Modern, 65; **Lynne Truss**, writer, 68; **Terry Waite**, writer, broadcaster and former hostage, 84.

Letter
Andrew Phillips

In his hugely energetic career Andrew Phillips, Lord Phillips of Sudbury (obituary, 12 May), made contributions in many fields. As a friend of his since schooldays I should like to mention his initiative to demystify the British constitution for teenagers.

I worked with him and colleagues at the then Citizenship Foundation (now Young Citizens) on Inside Britain – A Guide to the UK Constitution (2006), which has since gone into several editions and inspired a director of the Commonwealth Foundation to sponsor a guide to an even more ethereal institution, the Commonwealth. Andrew also served as a trustee of the Scott Trust, owner of the Guardian, for a decade from 1994.

Richard Bourne

Announcements

In Memoriam

SUMMERFIELD (nee RUMBLE). In loving memory of our daughter, Sally, and our granddaughter, Ella, who were taken from us so tragically in a road accident in New Zealand on 31 May 2014. Greatly missed by all the family and forever in our thoughts. Sue and Mike.

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, email us at announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number or phone 0203 353 2114.

Puzzles

Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku

Easy

9	3	6	5	8	7	2	4	1
4	1	5	9	6	2	7	3	8
2	8	7	3	4	1	5	6	9
7	6	2	8	9	4	3	1	5
3	9	1	6	2	5	4	8	7
5	4	8	7	1	3	9	2	6
1	7	4	2	5	8	6	9	3
8	5	9	4	3	6	1	7	2
6	2	3	1	7	9	8	5	4

Medium

3	1	6	2	4	8	7	9	5
9	5	7	6	3	1	8	4	2
2	4	8	7	5	9	6	1	3
1	6	4	9	7	3	5	2	8
8	3	9	5	2	4	1	7	6
5	7	2	1	8	6	9	3	4
4	9	1	8	6	2	3	5	7
6	2	5	3	9	7	4	8	1
7	8	3	4	1	5	2	6	9

Codeword

G		S		E		J		S		D		U
E	Q	U	I	P		E	X	T	O	R	T	S
N		P		I		R		A		I		U
I	M	P	A	C	T	S		R	A	Z	O	R
A		L				E				Z		P
L	O	Y	A	L	T	Y		W	A	L	K	S
L				I		S		H		E		
Y	I	E	L	D	S		L	A	P	D	O	G
		M		O		U		R				I
R	O	P	E	S		F	A	F	F	I	N	G
E		E				O				N		G
N	E	R	V	E		L	I	B	E	R	A	L
E		O		C		O		U		O		E
W	A	R	T	H	O	G		S	T	A	I	R
S		S		O		Y		T		D		S

Cryptic crossword

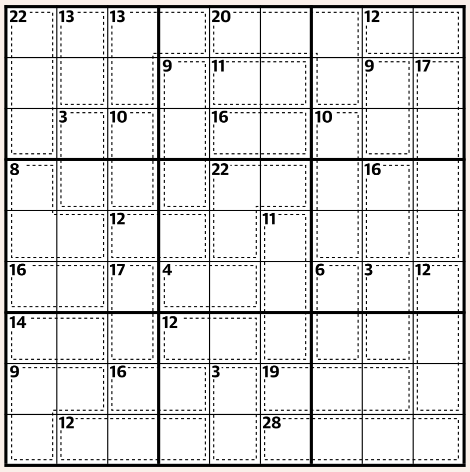
Solution No. 29,083

C	A	L	V	E		B	A	S	S	C	L	E	F	
H		I		L		O		H		O		R		
E	X	T	R	A	C	T	I	O	N	F	A	N	S	
R		I		N		T		P		F		S		I
R	I	G	A	D	O	O	N		N	E	W	T	O	N
Y		I				M				E				A
B	O	O	K	C	A	S	E	S		P	R	A	N	G
R		U		A		U		A		O		D		O
A	S	S	A	M		P	O	L	I	T	B	U	R	O
N				E				T				L		D
D	E	S	E	R	T		S	P	I	T	B	A	L	L
Y		L		A		S		E		H		T		I
	G	O	D	S	A	V	E	T	H	E	K	I	N	G
		T		H		E		R		M		N		H
	C	H	E	Y	E	N	N	E		E	I	G	H	T

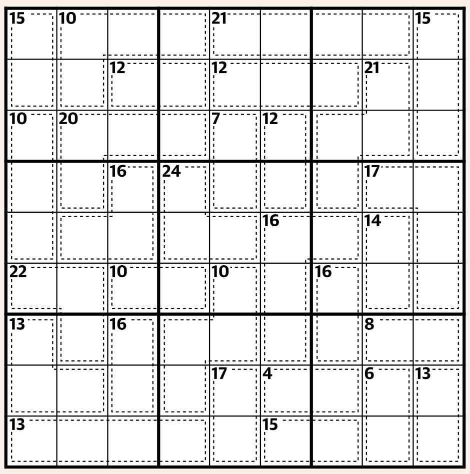
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.



Medium



Codeword

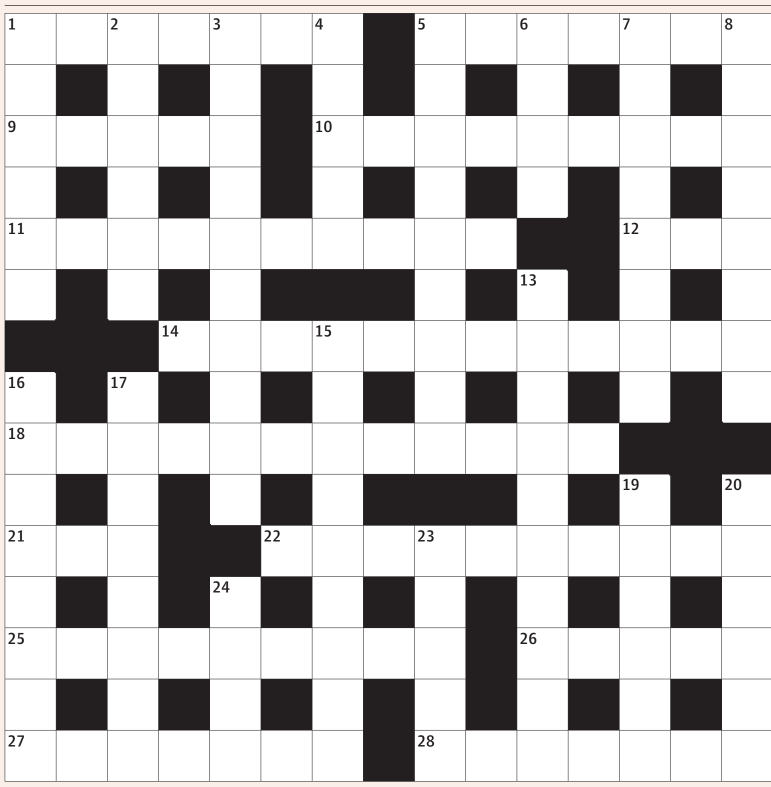
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.

	22		9		9		8	18	14	5	16	3
22	10	2	8	3	10	10 T	18		4		14	
	9		9		10		18		19	14	26	26
	19	9	11	11	9	23	7		11		26	
	8		4		2		18	11	9	8	8	21
8	3	16	2	18	5		14				2 I	
			22				10		22	18	5	16
	19		10	11	3	9	22	18	5		16	
6	3	10	22		24				18			
	20				2		11	3	25	2	5	1
1	14	11	3	22	22		3		19		14	
	3		5		18	12	12	8	18	9	1	
9	22	7	22		1		8		14		2	
	10		14		3	13	3	5	5	3	22	22
14	22	17	3	11	22		15		1		10	

A B C D E F G H ~~I~~ J K L M N O P Q R S ~~T~~ U V W X Y Z

1	2 I	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 T	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Guardian cryptic crossword No 29,084 set by Paul



Across

1 Turkey could be so badly defeated (7)
5 Splitter hearing what remains of traditional fare, 18 28 (7)
9 Figure second row should drop back (5)
10 Regulate old language across country (9)
11 Position taken, comment worthy of ridicule? (5,5)
12,26 Green light totally transparent (3,5)
14 Rear the old Queen's dog on American dough? (12)
18,28 What gets enciphered, shown unscrambled at a critical moment (4,3,5,3,4)
21 On stage (3)
22 Free bubbly came in before spread (10)
25 Newton-John's heartbroken about lead of Travolta in musical (2,3,4)
26 See 12
27 Undergarment Monet initially erased? (7)
28 See 18

Down

1 Deep-fried turnover, prophet tucking into it? (6)
2 Many university books falling to bits (6)
3 So LEVEL on both sides? (5-5)
4 Pass horse, on climbing (5)
5 OK offloading one at a satisfactory distance (3,6)
6 European rival somehow has caught up (4)
7 Reproduced, it's copied and made anew (8)
8 Indicator on ship not required (8)
13 Pattern emerging in rural location, having cut line in London (4,6)
15 Adonis little bit upset about muscly hero stealing sweetheart (9)
16 Rules drawn up on troughs for drinks (8)
17 Increase hydrogen, energy released from all the holes together? (8)
19 Look over middle of arbour, somewhere shady (6)
20 Capital city where the novel published (6)
23 Spy translation of Noyes in German, not English? (5)
24 My deep hole (4)

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